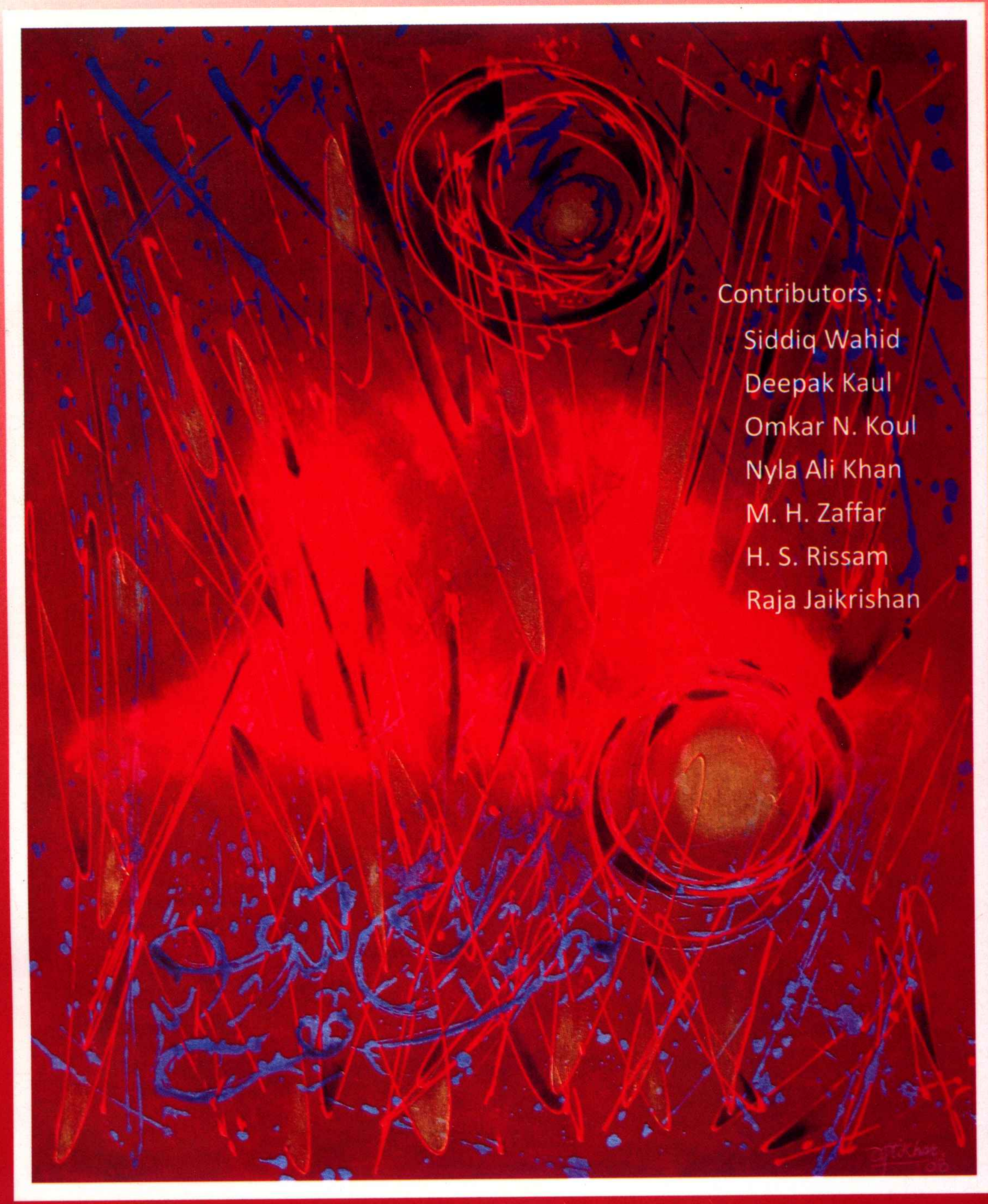
A Quarterly Publication of Kasheer Foundation

Miraas

Vol.-VI No.-II
April -June 2013

Reflecting the Culture and Heritage of Kashmir

RNI NO. DELENG/2008/24934



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THE GOLDEN MOON-II • acrylic on canvas - 36''x 48'' • Iftikhar Jaffar

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Miraas

Reflecting the Culture and Heritage of Kashmir

Vol. VI, No. II ◆ April-June 2013

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A Word With You

Foregrounding Culture and Heritage

Though 'Heritage' is a word bandied about much these days among Kashmiris, its meaning in practical terms eludes most of us. For instance, Srinagar is one of the oldest cities of India, yet its historical heritage, far from being acknowledged with pride, is hardly recognized by its own inhabitants. The way heritage buildings are torn down to make way for shopping complexes that have no character or semblance to the graceful old Kashmiri architecture, shows us up in extremely poor light. The ugliness of new structures, the noise and unmanageability of traffic, the open drains and dumps of filth, not to speak of the menacing packs of stray dogs, does not make a walk through the city a pleasant experience. It is with a sense of huge relief that one takes a boat ride on the river Jhelum, on the banks of which the city of Srinagar is spread. It is a rich way of reintroducing oneself to the city and its historical landmarks in a quiet, peaceful manner. Though drains pouring raw sewage into the river are a distasteful sight, yet they do not cause too many ripples to affect the gravitas of the Jhelum, which continues to flow placidly under its historical bridges, named unabashedly after old rulers and Afghan governors.

Soon after you move down from the 'new' first bridge, the Abdullah Kadal, with its resonance of recent history, you see an old graceful building on the right bank, which used to be the octroi post in the days gone by when a lot of trade was conducted through river transport. Even today one can see an occasional sand-laden *bahat* (flat, roofless, large boat) being rowed. And as you pass from under the Amira Kadal bridge (commemorating an Afghan governor Amir Khan), you suddenly realise that Srinagar is also a city of temples, several of which dot the banks of the river, overlooking the *ghats*. The mosques are built in different styles, but the temples are all of one mould, rounded, slightly conical roofs of shiny yellow metal. The elaborately designed stone and brick embankment of the Assembly Complex and the Collectorate, with trailing creepers reaching into the water, is another pleasing sight. You are happy to see newly built Lal Ded Centre where exhibitions of art and craft are held.

As you pass the next six bridges–Habbakadal, Fatehkadal, Zainakadal, Alikadal, Nawakadal and Safakadal–you are saddened to see abandoned houses overlooking the river. Graceful old houses with lots of woodwork and balconies, have gaping holes where there might have been windows. The erstwhile residents have either left the valley or moved to other parts of the city. Remnants of elaborate lattice-work (panjrakari) shutters hang upon a hinge, sad reminders of the

past of these houses. But the river itself, heavy with other flotsam and jetsam, unmindful of its surroundings, continues to flow in its grave, ponderous way.

Perched on the bank near the Zainakadal bridge is a Gazebo (garden pavilion), which once adorned the garden of Anand Kaul Bamzai, the scholar-historian of Kashmir, whose very name was an amalgam of Kashmiri and Afghan influences!

An important landmark is the Khanqah-i-Moulla, a beautiful stone and wood structure combining the best of Kashmiri religious architecture. It is situated between the Fatehkadal and Zainakadal bridges and the boat can be moored here so that one gets the time to pay a visit and be grateful that at least something has stood the onslaught of time and is still pristine in its glory. An interesting sight is the splash of vermilion on a low wall of the shrine facing the river. We were told that this is where the Kashmiri Pandits used to worship the goddess Kali on her birthday.

The river cruise enables one to look into the heart of the city, stirring our conscience and making us wish that something could be done to preserve our architectural heritage.

•••

Srinagar has witnessed a flurry of activities on the intellectual and cultural scene, thanks to the Dara Shikoh Festival and the many events hosted by the Srinagar chapter of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations. Another important and very welcome development is that the Mumbai International Airport is going to showcase Kashmiri crafts in a big way. Under the supervision of the acclaimed artist Nilima Sheikh, whose many paintings are based on Kashmir, artisans of papier mache, walnut woodwork, khatam band, panjrakari and ceramic tiles, produced beautiful specimens of their artistic skill, including large panels that will form part of the Mumbai airport's décor. The Srinagar chapter of INTACH organized an exhibition of these finished products at the Lal Ded Centre–a very heart-warming experience indeed. It was good to see a large number of young people taking interest in the traditional crafts of the artisans. In fact INTACH deserves praise for extensively documenting Srinagar's heritage buildings. One hopes that the grand old building which once housed the Rattan Rani Hospital near Barbarshah, will be spared the bulldozer as a result of its efforts.

In Delhi too, IGNCA seems to have revived its focus on the culture and heritage of Kashmir after a lull of a couple of years. In April, they organised a three-day festival on 'Revisiting Bhand Pather' in which, besides a very productive seminar on the Pather tradition, three Pather plays directed by M. K. Raina were staged. In July, they had a film screening on the topic 'Boatmen of Kashmir'. A happy augury, indeed!

—Neerja Mattoo

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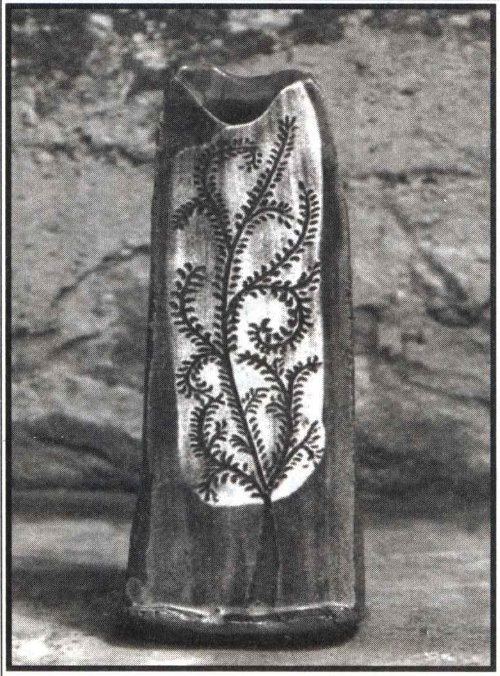

An exhibit from Dara Shikoh Festival 2013

'Badshah Pather' being staged at IGNCA, New Delhi

Collage: Raja Jaikrishan

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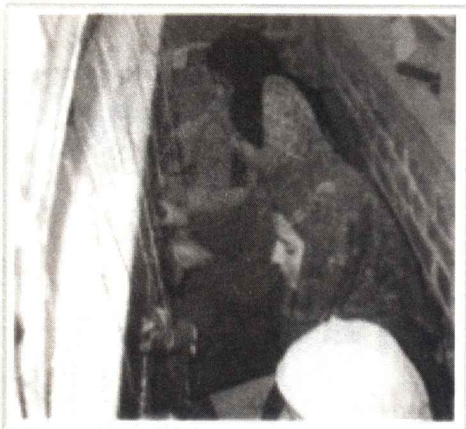
Photo: Tara Dhar Hasnain



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King Kesar's Conquest of China

Introduction and Translation by
—Siddiq Wahid

Introduction

The story of Kesar–also known as 'Ling Kesar' and, in its full form, 'Ling Gyal Lham Kesar'–is a pan-Tibetan epic that is also found in other languages. The overall theme of the story is about a hero who brings about order in a world that has become chaotic. This much is true of most epical tales. However, our story is a little different in that it has a prologue with several stories that at first glance seem to bear no connection to the main story. These preambles, as it were, set the stage for stories that seem to recount a creation myth, our hero's antecedents and foreshadows of Kesar's adventures to come. So in a sense, the Ling Kesar is much more than a straight narrative with our protagonist assuming the combined role of hero, healer and trickster. For this and other reasons, some have compared the Ling Kesar to the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Ramayana* and the *Gilgamesh* epics all rolled into one.

The story itself is simple. There is a land called Ling, which has a castle that is in ruins. The land of Ling is leaderless and in chaos. One day an old man of Ling resolves to ask the gods to send a leader to leaderless Ling. He, however, keeps forgetting to do it. But then one day as he is driving his cattle through the mountains, he witnesses a fight between a black yak and a white yak. Sensing that the white yak was a deity and the black yak a demon, he helps the white yak. This wins him a favour from Gyab Zhin, a god disguised as the white yak. When granted a wish for his help, he asks that the god send down one of his three sons to leaderless Ling so that he can restore order in the land of men. Lord Gyab Zhin promises him that it will be done.

On returning to the land of the gods, Gyab Zhin asks his sons to go to the land of men to help its inhabitants. The first two sons refuse but the third and youngest, Dondup, agrees to go to the land of men. After a reconnoitering trip, Dondup returns and then dies in the land of the gods so that he can be reborn in the land of men. In time he is conceived and born under miraculous circumstances. For the first few years of his life, he is in disguise but nevertheless experiences some minor adventures. Once grown up and married, he sheds his disguise and goes on a series of conquests and adventures. The hero's main battles are against the Demon of the North, the King of China and the King of the Hor, or western Mongols. These larger exploits are punctuated by several smaller adventures, contained in many episodes including contests, his marriage to Duguma and

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his many tributary wanderings between his greater adventures.

The section of the Ling Kesar presented here is one episode from one version of one recension from three different genres of the epic. These are traditionally called the Bab Drung (or 'revealed story'), Ka Drung (or 'oral story') and Pe Drung (or 'book story'), probably in that chronological order. The story is found in several dialects of Tibetan, and versions of it are also extant in Mongolian in book form and in Burushaski in oral form. As if all this is not confusing enough, our hero's name is also spelled in different ways. In the Tibetan versions it is spelled Gesar, in the Central Tibetan and the Western Tibetan versions it is spelled Kesar, in Mongolian it is spelled Gesser and in Burushaski it is spelled Kiser.

The episode on Kesar's Conquest of China was first published by A.H. Francke in 1905. It was narrated – it is an oral version – by the storyteller, Konchog Tashi Gyamtso, and transcribed by Yeshes Rigdzin, a school teacher at Khalatse in lower Ladakh as part of a project by Francke to preserve the entire epic in its oral form. In going through the text it is clear that much has been omitted, especially crucial repetitions that would help us to understand the methodology of the oral traditional narrative, in what we have inherited, especially crucial repetitions, by the scribe as he struggled to write down all he could in a rapidly chanted and substantively sung story. For similar reasons the flow of the language is also patchy at times. But despite these flaws the 'Lower Ladakhi Version', as it is called, preserves much and forms a precious heritage. In this day of audio and video recordings, it is difficult to appreciate how tedious a task this must have been. Francke himself bears testimony to this as he tells us that he 'closeted this bard for several weeks' in order to be able to preserve Konchog Tashi's gift to posterity.

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Let me add a quick word about the language, names and themes in this story. The language of the story is Ladakhi, which is Tibetan at base with Ladakhi forming an important branch within which several dialects can be identified. Now Tibetan names are difficult enough to pronounce as it is, given that the orthography of the language is prone to consonant clusters that often transform the pronunciations and, indeed meanings, of words. (By way of a quick example, the word for the number eight is *written* brgyad. In Central Tibet it is *pronounced* gye; in Ladakh gyad; in Baltistan brgyed!) Important though the orthography is, it can be offensively confusing for those who do not read the language. So, in deference to non-specialist readers of *Miraas*, I have rendered all Tibetan proper nouns phonetically. For want of space, I have also eliminated a transliterated glossary of the Ladakhi names as these too would be meaningless to the general reader.

To conclude this introduction let me relate a not irrelevant story.

Over three decades ago, I was asked to give a talk on the Ling Kesar to a group of undergraduate students in comparative literature. I began my talk with a potentially longish introduction about the story's antecedents, its anthropological context and the storytelling methodologies in Ladakh. My host was Professor Albert Lord–the legendary pioneer of oral traditional narrative theory and famous authority on comparative literature (see his *The Singer of Tales*, Atheneum, New York, 1976)– who had invited me to lecture to his very popular class at Harvard University. In his anxiety that his students' interest in the subject would wane if I continued with the scholastics of it all, he characteristically interrupted me and exclaimed: 'The tale's the thing Siddiq, can we get on with the story now!'

Keeping in mind that very pointed instruction, let me now get on to the story!

Translation

Kesar had subdued the seven dominions, so he withdrew to a region where there are three mountains–white, black and red. He had resolved to enter into a three-year retreat there.

Now if someone were to ask why he did this, it was because Kesar needed to find a way to penetrate China. He had concluded that if he went into retreat for three years, it would empower him to cast a spell on the king of the land. 'Surely,' he had reasoned, 'if I am able to cause some confusion in his kingdom in this way, I will find a way to enter his kingdom.'

After Kesar had been in retreat for a year and a half, he felt it was time to cast a spell on the Kingdom of China. The spell destroyed one wall of the palace, which caused the King of China to be taken gravely ill; so much so that he was unable to eat and was confined to the inner chambers of his palace.

At this, a hundred diviners, a hundred numerologists and a hundred astrologers were summoned to the Palace and asked to identify the cause of the King's illness. Their conjurations concluded with the following message: 'The cause of the illness is the casting of a spell by Kesar of Ling. The only way you can cure the illness is to invite Kesar himself to come here.'

On hearing this, the King of China assembled several of his nobles and sought their counsel. The Ministers agreed that they should send a letter inviting King Kesar. But fearing that Kesar would kill the messenger, they decided to send the letter with Dorre, the bird. The bird flew off with the letter and dropped it into the opening of Kesar's retreat cell.

Kesar read the letter which contained the following message: 'Our ruler, the King of China, is ill. He will not be cured unless you come here. We will happily offer you anything, gold, silver, jewellery and riches! We are prepared to give you anything that you wish; and your wish will be our command!' This was the message that was written in the letter.

But Kesar decided that he could not go to China unless they sent someone to escort him, as he did not know the way. So he stayed on in his retreat cell.

Now the King of China got sicker, because everyone was afraid to confront Kesar. So he made a cut in his hand and let blood flow. He mixed the blood with soil, shaped the dough into a human form and breathed life into it. He then wrote another letter to Kesar and gave it to the man. The man carried the letter, delivered it to Kesar and vanished.

Kesar read the letter inviting him to China. But he thought to himself: 'I have not yet completed the full term of my retreat. I will not be able to carry out my plans if I go now. So let me send Agu Khrai Thung for now.' Then he commanded the Agu to go to China.

Agu Khrai Thung mounted his horse and set off. However, he did not know the way either, so was confused and was lost.

•••

Now when he completed his three-year retreat, Kesar resolved to depart for China alone. Before setting off he sacrificed the goat Khabulu, tied just below his retreat cell, offered its flesh to the birds of prey and presented himself before the Grandsire Stonpa and the Grandam Ngonmo. He sang a song to them in this manner:

O Grandsire, you are rich and wealthy
If you have Deep Basket,
The one that can hold valleys and mountains
If you have Leather Sack,
The one that can hold sandy plateaus
If you have the Bowl,
The one that can hold broad rivers,
The Sinews of tiny lice,
The Lifeblood of Red Beetles,
A measure of glittering gold,
A measure of silken dust;
If you have these
You are rich Grandsire, wealthy.
If you have the cheeks, scarlet red, of she-Demon Ronemo,
The Demon Ragsha's arm,
A fistful of the sun's beams,
And a handful of the moon's rays,
O grandsire, you are rich, wealthy.

The Grandsire replied to Kesar's entreaties in this manner:

O Kesar of Ling, hear my genuine words,
Deign to hear my essential words!
I have Deep Basket that can hold valley and mountain,
The Leather Sack that can hold sandy plateaus,
The Bowl, the one that can hold broad rivers,
The Sinews of tiny lice,
The Life Blood of red beetles,
A measure of gold dust,
A measure of silken dust,
A fistful of the sun's rays,
A handful of the moon's beams,
A handful of the gathered stars' light,
But the cheeks of the she-Demon Ronemo,
The arm of the Demon Ragsha,
These I do not have!
For them, go to the Pasturelands of the Cold Country
Where the Agu dwells in isolation
You will find them with him, the cloistered elder.

At this, Kesar marched up the valley to the Cold Region and sang before the retreat cell of the Elderly Seer:

O mine Elder, hear my genuine words,
O Cloistered Elder, deign to hear my essential words!
My father, Thonpa, has a message entrusted,
The Grandsire Thonpa, a message he has sent!
The cheek of Ronemo, the she-Demon
The arm of Ragsha, the Demon
These, he says, are in your possession
Do you have them or do you not?
He asks that you tell me!

The Elder replied:

O mine Scion, listen to my genuine words,
O Kesar, deign to hear my essential work!
The cheek of the Demoness,
The arm of the Demon,
They are not mine to give!
But instead I will give you my two dogs,
To allow you to find the two things that you seek,
But first, for seven days here you must wait!

So spoke the Elder Seer and released his two copper-toned dogs so that they could help Kesar to find the she-Demon Ronemo and the Demon Ragsha.

Kesar then dug a pit with a small opening in it, crawled into the pit with his bow and quiver. He hid there and waited.

Seven days later, the two copper-toned dogs came into view. They were chasing the Demon and she-Demon as they would herd mountain stags.

Kesar quickly reached into his quiver, drew back his bow and let fly an arrow through the opening in the pit. Soon he had the arm of the Demon and the cheek of the she-Demon. The two had fled the place leaving behind arm and cheek.

Then, with the arm and the cheek of the Demon and she-Demon, Kesar returned to the land of Ling, mounted his horse, Rkyang Jung Jerba, slung his bow and quiver over his shoulder and set off towards China.

However, he did not bother to tell the Maiden Duguma.

Three days went by and Kesar came to a high mountain. Agu Khrai Thung was there, lost and stranded, at the foot of the mountain.

Kesar transformed himself into a Khampa and struck up a conversation with the Agu in song:

O lonely one on a solitary horse, hear my genuine words!
How did you come to this barren field?
If you are setting off, where are you going?
If you are returning, what has been your destination?

The Agu, not recognizing the speaker, replied:

O traveler from Kham! Hear my genuine words!
I am of the superiors from the Castle of Ling,
And to China's three provinces is where I am going.
I carry a letter for the King of China,
A letter from Kesar, King of Ling!
But I am lost on this empty plain,
Exhausted, starved, my clothes shredded!
So if it is towards Ling that you travel,
I have a message for King Kesar.
For me to backtrack now
Is but to invite the wrath of Kesar with all its might!

In answer to this, King Kesar sang this song to Agu Khrai Thung:

O hero of Ling, hear my genuine words,
O Chief of the Hawks, hear my essential words!
It's all in the past, your braggart ways,
Your claims to the leadership of Ling's braves
So be off, go back to our land, to Ling!

So spoke Kesar and, scolding Agu Khrai Thung, sent the Agu back to the land of Ling.

•••

Seven days later Kesar came to a place where there was a large lake between two mountains. He wandered about for a few days but could not find his way around the lakes or through the mountains. So he threw down Deep Basket that could swallow mountains and pulled out the Bowl that could contain a lake. Immediately the mountains disappeared and the lake dried up. Happy at this, Kesar continued on his way.

Three days passed by and the hero arrived at a broad sandy plain on which it was hard for both rider and horse to move fast. So Kesar opened his Leather Sack, the one that could hold an entire field of sand. And all the sand disappeared.

Three days later Kesar was attacked by a horde of lice. They had no sinews, so they bit Kesar and tormented him. He immediately took out the sinews, placed them inside the lice and overcame this obstacle also.

After another three days, Kesar came across some bloodless and blood-thirsty beetles. He inserted the blood he had with him into them and escaped unharmed.

Kesar continued on his journey for three more days. On the night of the third day, it became pitch dark and continued to remain so for ten days. The rider was starved and he could not find any fodder for this horse either. Overwhelmed, Kesar began to weep and sang to Aney Kurman Gyalmo:

O mine Aney, hear my genuine words,
O Kurman Gyalmo, hear my essential words!
Ten days in the dark, nothing can I see,
Ten days without sunlight for my mount or for me!
Help me mine Aney, you alone I ask for help!

In response to this plea, Aney Kurman replied in song:

O mine son, hear my genuine words,
O Kesar, hear my essential words!
Sun's rays, moon's beams and the light of the stars
If they do not help you today,
Of what use are they to you, my son?

The reply brought Kesar to his senses. He immediately pulled out the sun's rays, the moon's beams and the light of the stars. They shone brightly, clearly showing him the way from which he had strayed. It was a wondrous sight and Kesar was overjoyed.

Kesar journeyed for three more days and came to a place where a Demon obstructed his path. It was the Demon Ragsha whose arm he had cut off earlier. Kesar walked up to him and promised to restore his limb if he would let him pass.

The Demon replied, 'If you restore my arm, I will allow you to pass.'

Kesar pulled out the arm and restored it. The Demon was content and let him pass.

Three days later, Kesar encountered the she-Demon obstructing his path. It was the same one whose cheek he had cut off earlier. Kesar approached her and told her that he would restore her cheek if she would let him pass.

The she-Demon replied, 'If you restore my cheek, I will allow you to pass.'

So Kesar pulled out one side of her face and restored it. The she-Demon was content with this and let him pass.

Then Kesar journeyed for another three days and came to a steep glacier. He scattered the silken dust and started climbing. But it was difficult going and he kept sliding back down again and again.

Now as he was struggling at that place, three beggars came by. He offered these men the gold dust he had with him, for which they guided him across the glacier.

In this way, Kesar journeyed on. Eventually the King of China heard of the approach of Kesar. At this news he immediately appointed a party of mounted men to meet him.

The palace of the King of China was in the middle of a lake. As Kesar came closer to it, the King's health started improving. And by the time Kesar arrived at the palace gates, the King was completely cured.

•••

Meanwhile, Agu Khrai Thung was on his way back to Ling; as he was on his way, he thought: 'Kesar will surely lose his way on his journey to China and perish. I will exile Duguma and make myself Lord of the Castle of Ling.'

Once Agu Khrai Thung came to Ling, he gave Duguma a yak hair tent, handed her some provisions, announced to her that he was taking over the Castle and banished her to the lower outskirts of the land.

Duguma pitched her tent there and continued to live.

As for Agu Khrai Thung, he took over Ling Castle and appointed himself King. He wore three hats, piling them on top of each other. He fitted his horse with three pairs of stirrups and his dog with three collars. He then began to strut about, haughtily commanding the attendants.

•••

Now Kesar stayed in the palace of the King of China for twenty days. Then he approached his host saying, 'I would now like to take leave' and left the palace.

Now the King of China had a daughter named Yui Konchogmo. She took a liking to Kesar and wanted to leave with him. So she declared this wish, pressed for her right to take her personal wealth with her and set off with Kesar.

At this, the nobles and commoners of the land gathered to discuss the matter. The conclusion was that they could not allow Kesar to leave with their princess and her personal wealth. So they plotted to cast him into a spider pit and kill him.

One of the nobles then set off after Kesar and, on catching up with him, said, 'O Kesar! Are you going to return to the Land of Ling without even seeing our famous spider pit? What if the inhabitants of Ling ask you if you have seen the pit?'

Kesar thought that he should see this famous spider pit, so he returned to take a look at it. The nobles of the land opened the cover of the spider pit to allow Kesar to look into it. As he bent over to take a look, the nobles pushed him into it.

Now inside the pit were White Spider Dumbu, Black Spider Dumbu and Yellow Spider Dumbu.

As soon as he fell into the pit, Kesar slew White Spider Dumbu and spread out its skin as a carpet. He slew Black Spider Dumbu and placed him as a pillow. And he slew Yellow Spider Dumbu and wore [his skin] as a coverlet. Then, from inside the pit, he sang this song:

The White Spider is dead; he makes a good carpet,
There's nothing warmer, more comfortable in the land of men,
Than White Spider Dumbu.
The Black Spider too is dead, he makes a good pillow,
There's nothing warmer, more comfortable in the land of men
Than Black Spider Dumbu.
The Yellow Spider, he is dead; he makes a warm coverlet,
There's nothing warmer, more comfortable in the land of men,
Than Yellow Spider Dumbu.
Such bliss cannot be found anywhere,
Even in the land of Ling.

The gathered nobles were amazed to hear Kesar singing this from inside the pit.

'It appears,' they said, 'that Kesar still lives and even sings! How can we do away with him now?' After consultations, they concluded that they should kill him by pelting him with stones inside the pit.

Now Aney Kurmanmo heard this plan and spoke to Kesar:

> O careless Kesar! They are hatching a plan to kill you by stoning you. So quick, transform yourself into a golden fly and make your way up as the stones pile up. This is how you can escape!

A crowd of the Chinese gathered and began to hurl stones into the pit. Soon the pit was full. Kesar did as he was instructed by Aney Kurmanmo and climbed to the top of the pit and escaped.

After he had escaped, Kesar went off secretly to the pasturelands of the Cold Country from where he cast a spell. At this, the Kingdom of China was visited by many hardships, including leprosy.

Once more the Chinese assembled a hundred diviners to cast divinations and a hundred numerologists to conjure numbers.

Again the message emerged that Kesar was the cause of the afflictions, and that these would not go away unless the people of China asked for his forgiveness.

But the Chinese were surprised at this. 'Kesar is dead, for it is we, all of us, who stoned him to death!'

However, the diviners and numerologists told him that Kesar was in the pasturelands of the cold country.

So the King of China set off for the cold country with a retinue of attendants. They found him there, in retreat.

So they pleaded with Kesar, agreed to give him the princess Yui Konchogmo in marriage and offered him what he wanted in riches.

On hearing this, Kesar emerged from his retreat cell, returned to China and cured it of all its afflictions, including leprosy.

He then stayed on in the country for ten days after which he took leave of the King and set off for Ling. He took the Princess Yui Konchogmo with him, along with some of the dowry.

Now when they came within a day's journey from Ling, Kesar disguised himself as a man from Kham, conjured a black sheep, rolled a black carpet under his arm and put the princess and her belongings in his pocket. He then continued on his way, looking like a beggar before the people of Ling.

Then, as he reached the outskirts of Ling, he passed by the black yak-hair tent in which the Maiden Duguma was living but continued onto Ling Castle.

Once there, he saw that Agu Khrai Thung had occupied it, adorned his horse with three pairs of stirrups and his dog with three red collars; as for the Agu himself, he was wearing three hats.

Kesar then disguised himself as a seer and asked the Agu why he wore three hats when all other kings wore only one. Similarly, he asked why the horse wore three stirrups and the dog three red collars.

The Agu Khrai Thung replied:

One hat signifies that Kesar is dead,
The second symbolizes that Ling Castle is mine,
The third hat is mine, my personal hat.
One stirrup signifies that Kesar is dead,
The second symbolizes that Ling Castle is mine,
The third stirrup is the horse's own stirrup.
One collar signifies that Kesar is dead,
The second symbolizes that Ling Castle is mine,
The third collar is the dog's own stirrup.

Once he heard these words of Agu Khrai Thung, Kesar returned to the lower edges of the land where Duguma was living. He begged her for some flour. The Maiden gave him some and then asked him where he was from and to tell her of his journeys.

The disguised beggar replied that he was from China, at which the Maiden immediately asked if he had come to know of a king named Kesar.

The beggar replied, 'A certain one, Kesar I believe by name, did perish in China. The King of China hosted a splendid funeral feast for him, distributed a thousand offerings to the high monks and a hundred offerings to the junior monks. Even to me, a wandering beggar, they gave this black sheep and this carpet.' At this news Duguma swooned in sorrow and began to weep.

Kesar at once removed his disguise and showed himself. Duguma was overjoyed to see him.

Kesar then mounted his horse, charged at a fierce gallop towards Agu Khrai Thung and slew him with his spear.

After all this, King Kesar, the Maiden Duguma and the Princess Yui Konchogmo entered Ling Castle and lived together in peace.

And the heroes of Ling celebrated the return of Kesar to Ling.

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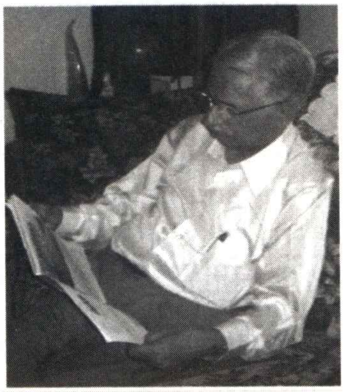
Focalisation of Violence:
A Study of Hari Krishan Kaul's Short Stories

—Tasmiya Bhat & Manpreet Kang

Violence has always been one of the central themes of literature since its inception. Creative artists, poets and fiction writers of all times and all cultures have viewed violence as a shocking aberration in human nature and expressed their repugnance and revulsion in innumerable works, and many of them are recognized as masterpieces of literature.


Hari Krishan Kaul
(1934-2008)

All movements in art and literature, like Modernism and Post-Modernism, were a reflection of violence and the corresponding disillusionment with the time- honoured themes and forms. And at the same time, a considerable bulk of literature and literary criticism in favour of violence against imperialism, capitalism, feudalism and fascism was produced throughout the world. Because of the political upheaval, Kashmiri society, known for its exemplary communal harmony and peaceful coexistence, has undergone a sudden and catastrophic end of the several millennia old cultural fabric. Propagation of violent exclusionist politics and the resulting bloodshed, massacres, mayhem, intimidation, coercion and excommunication have caused many schisms and ruptures in Kashmiri society. Literature produced in the Kashmiri language in modern times provides us with good examples of studying the nature of form and content of creative expression in extreme conditions of violence caused by communal schisms, cultural dissolution, and combative politics. Violence is a subject that most modern writers aiming at conveying the historical, psychological and artistic landscape of the modern world cannot avoid. In this global scenario, the impact of violence on Kashmiri literature was natural. All forms of Kashmiri literature reflect the predicaments, dilemmas and fears of the individuals and the community. The representative works of literature, whether produced by the migrant writers or insiders during the period of turmoil, are the true artistic reflection of the tragic calamity that befell Kashmir.

The present paper takes for its premise four short stories of Hari Krishan Kaul and analyses them in terms of the impact of violence on contemporary Kashmiri literature. The paper also attempts to depict how the short stories are the adequate reflections of the aspirations, struggle, cynicism, disillusionment, alienation and predicament of the common masses. The

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paper which discusses within the parameters of violence brings to the surface the fact that violence had its deleterious repercussions and left a mound of living, dead and desiccated corpses in its wake.

Hari Krishan Kaul (1934-2008), one of the best short story writers in the Kashmiri language, unveiled this unfortunate development of violence in Kashmiri ethos and the resulting bloodshed, massacres, mayhem, intimidation, coercion, and excommunication that has caused many schisms and ruptures in the exemplary communal harmony and peaceful coexistence in Kashmiri society, in many of his stories. One such story 'Taaph' ('Sunshine'), adjudged as one of the best short stories by literary critics, is a vivid reflection of the tacit scepticism of the time and also of the ambivalent relationship between the people belonging to two distinct communities. The story is in the form of an interior monologue by an elderly Kashmiri Hindu woman, named Poshi Kuj, who is living in New Delhi along with her son and her son's wife. Away from the chill of the valley of Kashmir she enjoys the warmth of New Delhi while sitting in the veranda of the government apartment allotted to her son. The warmth unleashes a train of memories, feelings, fears, hopes, and concerns in her mind. While ruminating about her living in downtown Srinagar, she re-assures herself that if nothing else, she is relieved of the 'polluted' hands of Muslim bakers, vegetable vendors, fisherwomen, and the house-keeper. Meanwhile, she fondly remembers how she would enjoy carefree tête-à-têtes with all of them there, and here in New Delhi she craves to have a chat in her own dialect. She hates to hear the *azaan* (prayer call in mosques) and wonders how it could be that it is allowed in New Delhi, 'the capital of her Hindu country'. Here is an excerpt from her rumination:

> On having reached Delhi, Poshi Kuj sensed a world of difference, and thus she heaved a sigh of relief. 'Damn all else, what matters is there is no trace of any Muslim here, all around there are our Hindu brethren to be seen... Milkman, a Hindu, baker, a Hindu... (Kaul, *Pati Laaraan* 12)

Poshi Kuj of Hari Krishan Kaul's story represents the general ambivalence of the Kashmiri Hindu community who, on the one hand are firmly rooted in their centuries old Kashmiri culture, and on the other hand, feel alienated for having been denied the privileged position in the post-independence democratic set up. It was not easy for them to be at par with the majority populace of Muslims and also to work under Muslim bureaucrats. They felt disillusioned with successive governments supported by New Delhi and in their anguish always sought succour from New Delhi. They knew it well that there was no possibility of return of the good old days when they enjoyed the feudal status in society and occupied most of the prestigious positions in the official hierarchy. There was, however, still some consolation that Kashmir was an integral part of India, but the constant and never-ending dialogue between India and Pakistan to 'resolve' the long standing political future of Kashmir generated a sense of uncertainty as well as rancour and ill-will among the minority. They always sanguinely looked forward to finding opportunities of leaving their land, doomed by political uncertainty and live a free life in mainland India. Only a few of them could find their dreams come true; the majority continued to remain submerged in anguish, alienation and humiliation. The unfortunate partition of India in 1947 had made the social and cultural schism very deep and there seemed no alternative in sight. While going to visit Birla Mandir in New Delhi, Poshi Kuj looks at the Pakistan Embassy and she confuses it with the temple of her dreams. Her daughter-in-law Choti smiles and tells her that it is the Pakistan Embassy. Poshi Kuj, not ready to believe, muses:

> ...How uncouth does she reckon me! But falsehood has no feet to stand upon. There in

> Kashmir, where all around you there are Musalmans, no one dares to name Pakistan, and here in our Delhi there could be the office of Pakistan! How does this daughter-in-law of mine tries to befool me! (14)

This kind of psychosis, common to all Kashmiri Hindus in the post-independence era, is reflected in many other stories of Hari Krishan Kaul. In his famous story 'Ongij' ('Finger') he creates a vivid picture of the age-old communal harmony, mutual understanding and sympathy, and sense of belonging to the same cultural substratum, but at the same time the story is a dramatic representation of discord, scepticism, suspicion and scare that originated as a result of over two decades long militancy, politics of hatred and exodus of the Hindu community. True to Kaul's art, following the classical framework of the short story, 'Ongij' is limited to one incident in the lives of two characters: a successful, vigorous Hindu businessman named Suman Dhar in South Africa (also called Suman Dar and Sumander) and Majid, a Muslim, an unemployed MBA of Srinagar, desperately trying to get a job and seeking avenues to come out of the depressing conditions prevailing in Kashmir. The story opens with Majid at Qahira Airport leaving for South Africa where Suman Dhar has managed to employ him as a Deputy Project Manager in the MNC where he works as the Chief Project Manager. During his journey in Qahira Airlines, his musings about Kashmir, his friends and the terror in Kashmir produces a long chain of memories when he observes the people of different cultures around him and their freedom to move about in the world. At Qahira Airport, for instance, he is reminded of the people and houses of Nawhatta and Hawal localities of Srinagar. The omniscient narrator records the following images in his mind:

In his famous story 'Ongij' ('Finger') he creates a vivid picture of the age-old communal harmony, mutual understanding and sympathy, and sense of belonging to the same cultural substratum, but at the same time the story is a dramatic representation of discord, scepticism, suspicion and scare that originated as a result of over two decades long militancy, politics of hatred and exodus of the Hindu community.

> Being a Kashmiri, Majid was more delighted at Qahira Airport; he felt as if the plane had carried him from Mumbai Airport and dropped him at Nawhatta or Hawal. The same houses, the same people, and the same was their attire (Kaul, *Zuul Apeeryim* 79)

Throughout his journey, Majid is carrying all the fears, inhibitions, doubts, prejudices, and biases that he lived with in Kashmir where terror, killings and intimidation had completely destroyed the millennium-old fabric of culture. He is completely disillusioned with the chaotic political conditions prevalent in the valley and, in his desperate struggle for survival, seeks help from his childhood Pandit friend Suman Dhar. The latter had offered the job to Ashok, a friend of his community, but he could not come because he had not got his passport. But Majid candidly tells him the reason of Ashok's inability to join the company:

> Ashok was appointed Junior Engineer at Badgama, but he must be residing in Delhi and enjoying, without doing any work, a migrant's salary. He must be getting his annual increments and also getting Dearness Allowance regularly. Meanwhile he might be working with some MNC against a fat salary. And they, being a private company, cannot leave him without getting work from him. Our *Mujahid*s and their Jihad did not do any good to us, the Musalmans; it has however showered silver and gold on you, the Battas (Pundits). (83)

This open but friendly uttering of Majid is apparently aimed at creating humour and making his Hindu friend a little happy, but the latter, without a smile, reflects for a moment and then tells Majid that at that point he offered the job to him and thus he came to be there. He tells him with equal frankness:

> How could you afford to have not come? Your arms and legs are bearing the shackles of India, or otherwise one may say that you have India's passionate hand on your head; so long this state of affairs continues, you need not attend your offices to collect your salary at the end of the month, or doing any other job. Living here, I read all the newspapers of India, Pakistan and the whole world through internet. I know it for certain that since 1988 you have been crossing the Line of Actual Control to get training in using Kalashnikov rifles and on the other side, your salaries continued flowing to your families. (84)

The two perspectives of assessing the situation in terror-stricken Kashmir are equally cogent and convincing. The grim reality existing there, whatever the professed politics, is actually like that. On the one hand, the Muslim majority living within the valley, having no other place to live, suffered and got killed in the conflict, but the government employees of the community thrived as they continued to get their salaries without doing any work. And on the other hand, people of the Hindu minority, mostly government employees, fled the Valley because of threats to their lives, and then they too got many advantages as they got their 'migrant salaries' plus allowances, and at the same time, opportunities of sending their sons and daughters to the best schools and colleges in different states of the country. Hari Krishan Kaul, being himself a migrant, unveils the under-cover social, economic and psychological reality of the years of militancy through the conversation between the two bosom friends belonging to different communities but free to express themselves as they are away from their native land. In the valley itself, no writer could dare to express himself so undauntedly, even through fictitious characters, as it meant death for him.

Majid and Suman go on chatting and laughing without any inhibition or fear; they enjoy the freedom of being away from their terror-stricken land. But their guffaws and expressions of joy convey pangs of the anguish that is deep- rooted in their hearts.

One more aspect of the general malice among the people of Kashmir who persevered to live in extremely perilous conditions is depicted when Majid, as a gesture of friendship, pays a visit to Suman Dhar's house and meets his friend's wife. His reaction is immediately visible when he, like a typical Kashmiri young man deprived of seeing girls and women in their unveiled physical form, seems delighted, something that he cannot even hide:

> ...Suman introduced his wife to Majid:
>
> 'Here is your *Bhabi*... I mean my better-half!'
>
> With a smile on her face she said *namaskaar* to Majid.
>
> Majid also responded with his folded hands, and then cast a deep piercing glance at her...Majid heaved a cold sigh. (88)

And when he sees the maid servant at Suman Dhar's house, he greedily looks at her physique with hungry eyes. While they are engrossed in friendly gossip, Majid naively utters a sentence that connotes slang '...but we Kashmiris never discriminated between our own kindred and the strangers; my brother was always your brother and your brother-in law (brother of wife) was always mine....' This irks Mrs. Dhar and the warm gossip ends there. She leaves with her eyes wet. Majid repents on being so rude with her, does not enjoy the meals and leaves the house morosely. He does not dare to call at the house again during his term of contract of three months.

The two bosom friends of the past, however, grow sentimental at the time of departure. Majid finally ventures to apologise for his 'slip of the tongue' during the gossip when they met last time at Suman Dhar's house. To his further embarrassment he comes to know that it was not the use of slang that had irked Suman Dhar's wife and made her weep; she on the other hand had remembered her brother killed by militants. Suman Dhar says to Majid:

> My brother in law... that is Kiran's brother, Sanjay was the only brother of three sisters. He worked as an engineer in the telecommunication sector. On March 8, 1990, militants or Mujahids killed him mercilessly and blatantly. First they removed his eyes and then pumped a volley of bullets into his body. When you mentioned, once or twice, my brother-in Law, Kiran felt as if you fired bullets at her. Majid was struck numb. (102)

Hari Krishan Kaul, who loved his native land passionately and had a wonderful circle of loving friends there, lived his final years in exile. He lost interaction with all of them and the pain of alienation was so shocking to him that he developed Alzheimer's disease and died in 2008 at New Delhi. Before his death he wrote some stories that depict the lives of the Pandit families that for political or economic reasons had to leave their homeland and live in the congested cities of the various states of the country. One of his most celebrated short stories is 'Yath Raazdanyey' ('Here in this Capital') in which the day-to-day life of loneliness, frustration, dreams of coming out of the economic crises, disillusionment with kith and kin and nostalgia combined together produce a tragic picture of a Kashmiri Hindu family displaced from their homeland.

Majid longs to go to Suman Dhar's house again and express his repentance and sympathy to Kiran, but it is very late. The two friends hug each other and Majid with his tearful eyes requests Suman Dhar to communicate his regrets to Kiran. He reveals a grim reality of all Kashmiris when he says:

> ...and tell her, please, that this is exactly what happened to his two maternal cousins. Mushtaq got killed in a cross-firing at Maisuma. And the other one, Basharat doing his M.Tech at Kanpore, was engaged to my younger sister Jamila; he came for a fortnight to perform the *nikah*, but just after four days disappeared. Nobody knows whether he was killed by the Indian army on the suspicion of being a Pakistani spy, or by the militants for considering him an informer of the Indian army. Poor Jamila is still waiting for him and my mother is almost demented. (103)

This passionate conversation between the two friends reveals the mystique of the whole predicament of the Kashmiri people. They, for no fault of theirs, are sandwiched between the warring countries and are being consumed as cannon fodder. Their intermittent flare-up in the large-scale turmoil is their desperate attempt to decide their uncertain destiny this way or that way, *aar yaa paar*, as they call it.

Hari Krishan Kaul's story 'Ongij' ('Finger') ends with a sombre and dismal statement by Majid before he bids his final adieu to his bosom friend living thousands of miles away from his homeland:

> Samandar! (Suman Dhar/ Ocean) you are really like a vast and free ocean after leaving your home. But, you know, I have still my home. It is a different story that I have to take a long journey, but have to reach there finally. My separated friend! It is getting late for me. (104)

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> The capital of such a huge country and that too engulfed by this thick haze! Nothing but the shed of the bus stop and a few persons waiting for the bus was visible. Yes, on the right side, a gigantic image of Akbar Hotel emerged in the haze and on the left side across the Ring Road blurred contours of high buildings of Bhikaiji Complex and an apparition-like profile of Hyatt Regency Hotel could also be discerned...' (Kaul, *Yath Raazdanyey* 15-16)

The life of a Kashmiri Pundit, Mohanji, in such an alien city is terrifying for a Kashmiri reader because of the non-existence of any social communication, and lack of commitment in work make him a robot-like being lost in a crowd. The ghastly and hideous picture of his loneliness is suggested by the city enveloped in the mist, the hazy images of half-visible unfriendly buildings, the silent persons waiting for the bus and the road with its two ends covered by haze.

Mohanji is used to this kind of unpleasant life of the metropolis. He has almost lost his sense of alienation and, having worked for so many years there, has finally conditioned himself to become an indistinct part of it. He also has no inkling of his past and no defined idea of his future. The conditions he lives in make him move about without any reflection and intention. He, nevertheless, had a feeling of having achieved great success when he started his career in the Capital of the country, having managed to be away from Kashmir. But that sense of achievement has finally petered out:

> Whenever he visited Kashmir after an interval of a year or two years, he used to say to his friends, 'You are still leisurely sitting at your homes; there in Delhi at this time in the morning, I having finished my bath and breakfast, am already at my office over twelve miles away from my residence.' ... But now I did not find anything worth taking pride in. He many a time laughed at himself at what he achieves by routine shaving, having a bath and leaving his residence to work. And then he had already given up going to Kashmir. Whom would he go to see there after all? To whom would he express his sense of achievement? Who is there now to listen to him? The elders have already departed and the youngsters have already fled. (16-17)

This grim reality of Kashmir presented in 1996 had started prevailing many years before and was reflected in many poems and stories of the earlier period. The short story 'Yath Razdanyey' is one of the serious attempts to capture the teething troubles, ambiguities and contradictions of the lives of Kashmiri Pandit migrants living outside Kashmir. Mohanji of the short story under reference is putting up in a small apartment, too small to accommodate any guest or relative. But on the day of the main incident getting unfolded, he is expecting his sister (Sara), his sister's husband (Pramode) and toddler niece (Jipsy) from Kolkata. The family has arrived in New Delhi, and are temporarily staying at Vasant Vihar at a friend of theirs. He and his two children are jubilant to receive the family because he has not seen his brother-in law and his family for the last four years. However, Mohanji's wife is extremely worried because there was hardly any space for the guests in his apartment. She would also face much humiliation because the toilet is not in order, and there is hardly anything presentable in the kitchen. However, to her consolation it was a matter of only a day or two because they were going to Ahmedabad. Mohanji is out of bounds with joy and is busy in arranging everything for the delight of the guest family.

Facing all manner of distresses, hurdles and aches, Mohanji makes it to New Delhi railway station to get reservation forms for his three relatives to Ahmedabad as he was given to understand that it was difficult to get railway reservations.

With the intention of receiving the guest family and getting them to his apartment, Mohanji reaches the Vasant Vihar luxury apartment were the family is temporarily residing. He meets his sister who exhibits all sorts of upper class mannerisms and this makes him uncomfortable. Promode is away to meet some of his friends. After a little warm chitchat, his sister Sara inquires if it was possible for her to purchase a *jamvar* shawl (a very costly Kashmiri shawl) in New Delhi. He assures her that it was possible somehow but his sister immediately tells him that she could not purchase it presently because there was a huge income tax deduction from her salary; this increases Mohanji's anxiety which he tries to hide. He takes out the reservation forms and begins filling them so that he could get them signed. But Sara tells him that they do not need railway reservations as they have already got air tickets. This irks him further.

When he reaches home, his wife Sheela asks him why he has not got the guests along. To her ease and pleasure, he informs her that they shall stay there and come only for dinner in the evening and then go back. All his fervour has petered out and, without showing interest in his meals, tries to have a nap so that he could calm his agitated mind. He even slaps his two kids who come running from the school to see little Jipsy, their cousin. After having silenced the kids, he wraps himself up again in the blanket to console his rattled mind.

The analysis of the story given above cannot bring to surface the actual psychological condition of the hardships, anguish, pretensions, day-to-day crisis of a displaced family; the intensity of expression is felt only in the use of words and sardonic expressions in the original text. However, the story reveals much about the quandary of a lower middle class Hindu family uprooted from their social and cultural base. In spite of their best attempts to be like and behave like non-Kashmiri Hindus of Delhi or of any other city, they become a laughing stock for others. Their loss of identity is an irreparable tragedy for their progeny. Having lost their cool and calm surroundings, their social interaction and customs and rituals, they are holed up in small dingy flats in congested and multi-storeyed buildings. The claustrophobia and forlornness is initiated by the concluding lines of the story:

> In the meantime, Babloo and Dabloo returned from their school. While relieving themselves of the school bags, they joyously raised a din: ' *Jipsy kahaan hai?... bolo mummy woh loog kyoon nahin aaye?* (Where is Jipsy? Tell us Mom, why didn't they come?)
>
> Mohanji suddenly stood up from the bed and slapped both children with full force. 'You miserable urchins! Raising so much of hubbub! ... And then trying to speak in Hindi! As if they have been living here for seven generations! Unlucky waifs! They belong neither to this place nor to that.'
>
> The kids and their mother were flummoxed and dumb-struck. Mohanji again crouched under the blanket and slept. (Kaul, *Yath* 27-28)

One remarkable story of Hari Krishan Kaul written during the early years of the current political upheaval is the title story 'Zuul Apeeryim' ('The Yonder Lights'), of his collection published in 2001. The story is the portrayal of just one evening of a forlorn elderly couple, Nathji and Piyari, living in Kashmir. This ordinary and day-to-day event is a complete reflection of all the isolated Hindu families that did not leave their homes or had no alternative. Their only son Bita, who has got a job in Canada, has decided not to return to his homeland. Nathji, a school teacher, had to expend all his earnings, even dispose of their ancestral house in the downtown, on the education and professional training of Bita. They, living in a newly half-constructed small house on the outskirts of the city, are craving for a chat with any neighbour, friend or relative. The sparsely inhabited locality, unkempt roads, and constant fear make their lives miserable. Their life is nothing but a vain counting of days, a hopeless going on.

The writer has very artistically avoided explanations and statements on their lives and given only an objective depiction of the very ordinary happenings and details of the chosen evening. The husband and wife, engrossed in watching a folk music performance on their television, get startled on hearing two simultaneous sounds, one of the pressure cooker and the other of the knock at the door of their ground floor. Nathji, in spite of Piyari's stopping, gets up and goes down the stairs and comes back with the consolation that there was nothing wrong. He keeps the window open and gazes at the bright lights of the colony of army officers on the slopes of the hill beyond the national highway and thickets of willows. He invites his wife too to have a look on the luminous town:

> '... Do you know, how beautiful does this landscape look in the evening! Away, across the river that settlement of army people creates an illusion of Mumbai.'
>
> 'But when did you happen to be in Mumbai that you find an illusion of that place in the landscape of this place?'
>
> 'When did I say that I have been to Mumbai? May be I have seen that landscape in some movie, or it may be that it is my own feeling that Marine Drive on the sea shore might be looking as beautiful as this one in the dark.' (Kaul, *Zuul* 9-10)

This small detail, apparently insignificant, reveals much about Nathji's desperate attempt to ward off his terrible loneliness and his craving to leave Kashmir as others have done.

To conclude, all the above discussed stories voice the undercurrents of violence that are clearly seen lurking and looming in the writings of most of the contemporary Kashmiri writers. Hari Krishan Kaul, being himself a victim of this unfortunate calamity which befell the Kashmiri people, has revealed objectively with great artistic perfection the miseries, sorrows, struggles and the suffering of both the communities during the days of turmoil in the valley. His views are not partisan and he does not empathize with any community. He, on the contrary, successfully contrives such plots and creates such characters as are true to the years of unprecedented violence and bloodshed and the resulting social disintegration. Each story presents a unique space in which the impact of violence on individual and collective life is perfectly focalized. He only informs the readers about the weird and tragic fallouts of violence. The writer subtly depicts not only the emotional trauma of the people who migrated from Kashmir to other places due to coercion and intimidation and had to face great hardships in the process of assimilation and integration but also portrays the pangs and pain of the people who continued to remain in the valley and faced the horrors of violence. All these stories are an intelligent analysis of violence, the swiftness and wildness with which it was perpetuated and the damaging legacy left in its wake.

After having their evening meals, they crouch under their quilts, but Nathji whiles away his time turning the pages of an old atlas. He concentrates his attention on the map of Canada:

> 'Here is Canada and this is its capital Ottawa ...and this spot is Halifax where our Bita is...Halifax is not much far away from Ottawa, And then it too is located on the sea-shore, or it may be something like an island near the shore, and as such climate of this place must be quite temperate, just like that of Mumbai.'... (18)

This scene is highly suggestive of the protagonist's craving and pining to leave their present abode which is the symbol of darkness, loneliness, separation and expulsion. The symbolic sagacity of the short story, the meaning of its title and Nathji's continuous aspiration of Mumbai, certainly reveals the fact that the story addresses the ruins of violence. The story is highly suggestive of the obscurity, gloom and void as ruminants of turmoil. The protagonist's continuous contemplation of Mumbai also has a symbolic tinge as Mumbai symbolises the carefree life of joy, happiness and peace which he longs for: 'It may be that he has an abiding love for lights, electric lights, light of the sun under a clear sky, pleasant sunshine on the earth. Perhaps he longs to enjoy all this...' (18). The husband and wife, hiding their anxieties and apprehensions from each other, are startled again when they hear a sound in their compound. Nathji, with a torch in his hand, climbs down the stairs and walks into the small compound. He finds that a stray cow has entered the compound to find something to eat. After having forced the cow to leave, he shuts the outer gate, latches the door of his house and tells his wife what had happened. Piyari asks Nathji why the owners of the cows do not provide them space in their barns and let them wander in the streets. Without any reflection, Nathji, in response to this question of Piyari, explains that these stray cows are the cows that have stopped giving milk. He further tells her that the peasants and milkmen have sold most of their useless cows to butchers. He immediately understands that he has said something nasty that would add to Piyari's disgust or might give her nausea. The stray useless cows could be suggestive of the aged men and women neglected by their kindred:

> Piyari replied to Nathji, 'After having consigned to butchers, they get their throats slit. Well, it is a blessing for these poor creatures, really a great blessing. Is it not better to have your throats slit with knives than being abandoned as hapless beings?'
>
> Nathji could sense that Piyari was silently weeping with her face covered under the quilt. He too crept into his bedding, put the table lamp off and wrapped himself up with the quilt. (19)

The trepidation, forebodings, helplessness and sense of loneliness, that too during the days of violence in the city, is thus beautifully represented in the story 'Zuul Apeeryim' ('The Yonder Lights') by Hari Krishan Kaul. The story closely parallels the final phase of the writer himself.

To conclude, all the above discussed stories voice the undercurrents of violence that are clearly seen lurking and looming in the writings of most of the contemporary Kashmiri writers. Hari Krishan Kaul, being himself a victim of this unfortunate calamity which befell the Kashmiri people, has revealed objectively with great artistic perfection the miseries, sorrows, struggles and the suffering of both the communities during the days of turmoil in the valley. His views are not partisan and he does not empathize with any community. He, on the contrary, successfully contrives such plots and creates such characters as are true to the years of unprecedented violence and bloodshed and the resulting social disintegration. Each story presents a unique space in which the impact of violence on individual and collective life is perfectly focalized. He only informs the readers about the weird and tragic fallouts of violence. The writer subtly depicts not only the emotional trauma of the people who migrated from Kashmir to other places due to coercion and intimidation and had to face great hardships in the process of assimilation and integration but also portrays the pangs and pain of the people who continued to remain in the valley and faced the horrors of violence. All these stories are an intelligent analysis of violence, the swiftness and wildness with which it was perpetuated and the damaging legacy left in its wake.

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* * *

Future of Carpet Industry in Kashmir Valley and Status of Weavers

— K. A. Wani & J. L. Bhat

The handmade carpet industry in India has about 1% share of total global demand of carpets in India with the help of more than 2,500 exporter-cum-manufacturers and two million artisans. Handmade carpet belts in India lack infrastructural facilities, marketing and commercial support, and governmental help to achieve potential growth.[1] It is an admitted fact that the carpet industry plays a vital role in the economy of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and is rated as the number one industry out of the seven major handicrafts of the State. The industry is not only job-oriented but also a leading foreign exchange earner. The position can be ascertained from the fact that the value of handicrafts goods exported in 2007-08 has been to the tune of Rs.1200.47 crore out of which 54% is the share of the carpet industry. At present, the manufacturing of carpet has become a viable industry, engaging more than 0.970 lakh people, besides those who are professionals in designing, finishing and washing.[2]

The Kashmiri carpet is a product that has captured the hearts of people all over the world, mainly on account of their intricate designs and their durability. Apart from the traditional use of the Kashmiri carpet as a covering for the floor, it serves some other uses too, like that of a wall-hanging or as bedding. The art of carpet weaving in Kashmir has been passed on from one generation to another, with most of the weavers still preferring to hand-weave the carpets rather than to use a mechanized process. The carpets with intricate designs last for long periods of time and the price of a Kashmiri carpet ranges from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 2,00,000 depending upon the design and the raw materials used.[3]

The department of handicrafts has launched a massive carpet promotion scheme which is playing an important role in increasing the production level by increasing the number of artisans. The technical training is given to the artisans at the elementary and the advanced levels. Most of the Kashmiri youths are engaged in private carpet units and the rest have installed their own looms [Salam, 2003]. Carpets in 20x20, 30x30, 50x50 and 60x60 knots per square inch are made in Kashmir. The design is generally drawn on graph paper and is divided according to the pattern. In the beginning, the designs were entirely Persian, but over the years Kashmiri influence on designs has percolated into the technique giving it Kashmiri originality. The local and regional flora and fauna have its influence on the designs. The raw material, fine workmanship, dyeing delicacy of design and finish are the factors that contribute to the fine quality of Kashmiri carpets.

The situation at present, however, is not promising and the recessionary trends have crept in the industry. If corrective measures are not taken forthwith, then this proud heritage of Kashmir is bound to nosedive if not vanish altogether. The industry has already been captured by the unscrupulous elements. The renowned silk carpet of Kashmir has already

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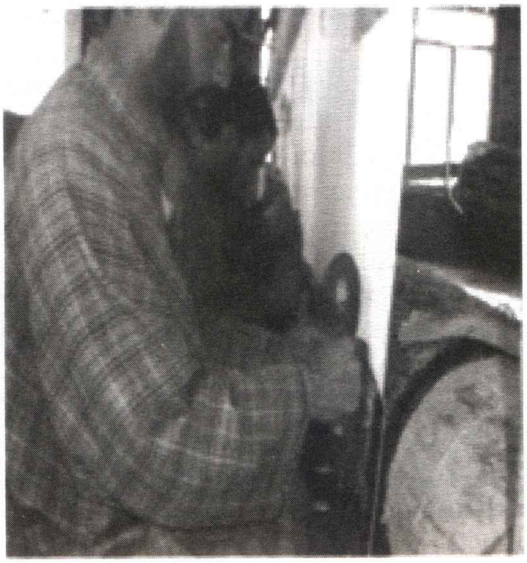
been replaced by the artificial silk carpets. The refusal from Gulf countries in 1980s and then subsequently from Europe to accept and buy the Kashmiri carpets are some of the examples.[4]

The carpet industry in Kashmir has developed large and informal contracting and subcontracting networks. The weaving work is portioned out by the exporters through the contractors who are usually influential people and the weavers also hire additional weavers. It has been found that usually the wages are made on daily basis and rarely on monthly basis, but the wages are paid to the weavers only after the completion of the entire carpet. The daily wages range from Rs. 50-150 per day.



The carpet weaving is a continuous and monotonous activity, and requires sitting in a specified fixed position with full concentration. Generally two to eight weavers, both males/ females, work together on a single loom from morning till evening. At present, it has been noticed that Kashmiri carpet industry has shifted from male to female dominated industry. The handmade carpets in Kashmir are produced in home-based workshops and rarely in government centres, where weavers gather and weave carpets. The vertical looms are predominant in Kashmir and the weavers are forced to sit on a piece of lumber during the work hours without any matting during the four seasons.

Profile of the Weaving Industry

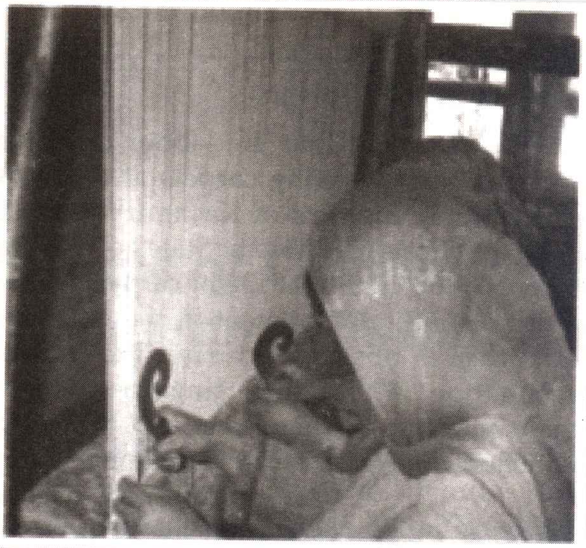
The cost of the looms in Kashmir valley ranged between Rs. 20,000 to 50,000 because the weaving technology was restricted and, the processing was craft-oriented. The required appliances were made locally and were found to be the same for everyone irrespective of the sex and age. It was also noticed that the size of the loom varied depending on the size of the carpet.

Condition of the Weavers

It was observed that the labour class was associated with weaving carpets at Pulwama and Anantnag districts of Kashmir valley. In spite of the efforts made by the State government to improve the quality of life of carpet weavers in Kashmir, no improvement in the quality of their life was observed during the present investigation. Although during the past few years expansion in the market and rise in the production were observed, yet their real earning was smothered due to escalation in the prices of daily items.

The rich people, usually referred as 'Ustad' in local terminology, were enjoying a secured position in the society by controlling the supply of raw materials to the weavers and the supply of the products to the market. They were completely independent because they were able to purchase the raw materials by themselves and were able to market the products. Moreover, they were also able to weave the carpets by themselves. They were getting very good returns from the source trade, and it was observed that they were making up to 100% profit. It was observed that the moderately poor and independent weavers remained as such throughout their life. They were completely dependent on the middlemen, not only for the market, but also for the supply of raw materials and credit. About 67% of the weavers were found to be in debt from their middlemen because their insolvency did not allow them to borrow through the formal channel.

It was found that there was ample scope to upgrade the skills of the workers and to improve the quality of their products but the concerned department of the State government did not take

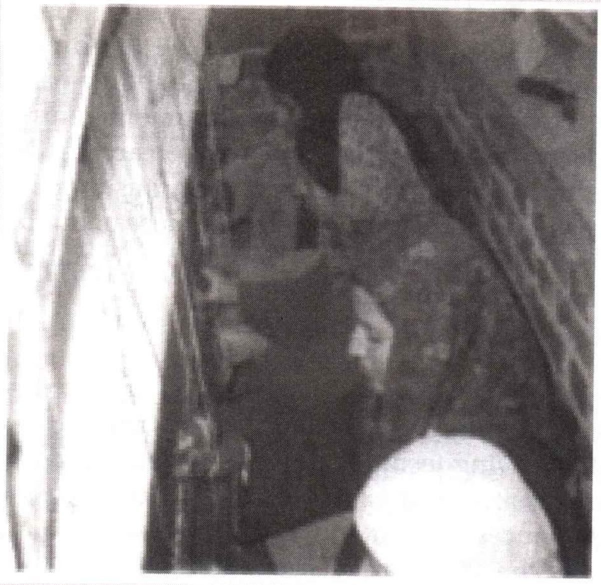


any necessary step in this direction. The purpose of the government sector is to promote the weaving work which may improve the skill of the weavers and may keep the weaving spirit alive among them. These efforts may improve the quality of life of weavers in the Kashmir valley. It was observed that the State Government was providing training to the young Kashmiri girls for a period of two years, with a stipend of Rs 500 to 700 per month. The training was repeated for one additional year without any stipend. It was observed that most of the weavers after training set their own looms and were in a position to employ 2-5 weavers.

Status of the Weaver

Under the adverse conditions and with the linked resources, the carpet weavers of Kashmir valley were doing a great job to keep the glorious heritage of Kashmiri carpets alive. Moreover, they were providing livelihood to the thousands of people associated with it. It was, however, observed that the carpet weavers of Kashmir were in a state of distress. It was also observed that the carpet sector in Kashmir valley was struggling for its survival against the competition from other countries, exploitation from the middlemen and the vicious circle of debts. In the present context, when the job opportunities are shrinking, it becomes necessary to strengthen and ensure the survival of this industry which may not only provide livelihood to a large population in Kashmir but may also keep the Kashmiri art and heritage alive.

It was found that the working and living conditions of the weavers and their family members were miserable. The main source of income of the weavers was weaving only. The weavers were only paid during weaving and the women and children involved in other activities related to weaving were never paid. Most of the weavers were illiterate or had little education. It was observed that children of the weavers family were not attending the school due to financial constraints or they were required to assist the weaver during weaving process. **During the present investigation, the weavers conveyed their displeasure over the fact that the master-weaver deducted the wages of the weavers for a spoiled piece and did not pay them extra money for a good piece.** Even though the weavers preferred to work for the master-weavers because they had to approach them for financial assistance whenever they required it i.e., during their illness or during any family celebrations like marriages, etc., the information regarding the government schemes was not available to all the weavers. It was observed that the master-weaver and the traders have a feeling that the capacity of the weavers far exceeded the work they actually performed. Because of that, the weavers evinced a lethargic

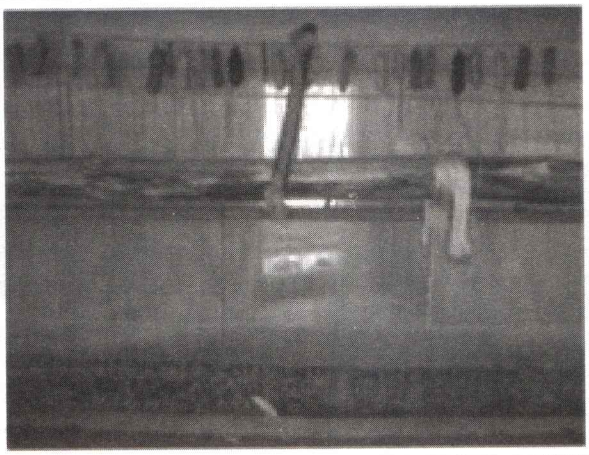


and casual attitude towards their work. This negative attitude of the weavers played a significant role in their reduced earnings.

It was noticed that the steps taken to protect the industry were insufficient. It is necessary that effective measures should be taken to save this wonderful art and to help the industry reach a position of strength.

Working Conditions

Generally, the master-weaver set the loom at his residence and employed five to eight weavers for weaving the carpets. In addition to it, the other family members of the employed weavers, including women and children, were engaged in the process for other activities like spinning of yarn on charkhas and turning of yarn into hanks. It was observed that looms were usually installed at a congested place with poor lighting conditions that developed problems related to vision among the workers. During the present study, many workers reported about the vision problem, especially in winter season when the weather was cloudy and the rooms were tightly closed. It was found that due to the absence of proper ventilation and the heating systems at the workplace, especially in severe winter, the weavers developed several health problems. Since weaving is a fine art, proper lighting condition and fresh and healthy air at the workplace are required to increase the working capacity of the weavers.[5]



Reasons and Solutions

Gone are the days when our weavers were singing the songs of Habba Khatoon *(Malie Nev Ho)* and Wahab Khar, while the yarn was being tied to wrap the chains to form the pile of carpet that was adding taste to their job. Today it is very difficult to find these weavers as there are only two or three weaving homes in some villages and few training centers established by the concerned department. But these weavers too have lost their interest in this craft which is a mere burden for them. They are weaving simply because they feel compelled to do so due to poverty, or simply because they have nothing else to do. What has happened to them? Why are we losing this cultural heritage? Weavers at different places came out with different reasons and different suggestions. A good number of people blamed the falling market for crippling the craft, some the department of handicrafts, some believed that it was all due to unstable conditions in the valley. Some put it on the shoulders of society because they are not respected in society while some others found it prudent to keep silent. Do we still need this industry? The answer is obviously 'yes' for a number of reasons: easy start, small capital investment, higher employment potentiality, etc. Who will come forward to bring weavers back in action? The Department of Handicrafts can play an important role, but they have to wake up from their deep slumber. They have to come up with an action plan in order to make Kashmir a flourishing field for its numerous crafts. Paying Rs. 500 a month to a girl trainee will not attract people towards this industry these days. These industry centres will have to prepare weavers in such a way that they can establish their own units. The teachers of the centers have to take keen interest in the profession. The Department has to review its policy and come up with solid solutions which could be implemented as soon as possible. To achieve this, markets have to be surveyed, and vocational education has to be promoted in schools and colleges. Banks have to be involved and employment exchanges have to come into picture. The future of this industry is bleak and once it is dead, it is difficult to revive it. We do agree with the concerned department that some of the above suggestions have already been introduced but what results they have produced remains to be seen.

We are sure that if steps are taken in the right direction, the carpet industry will get organized and revitalized.

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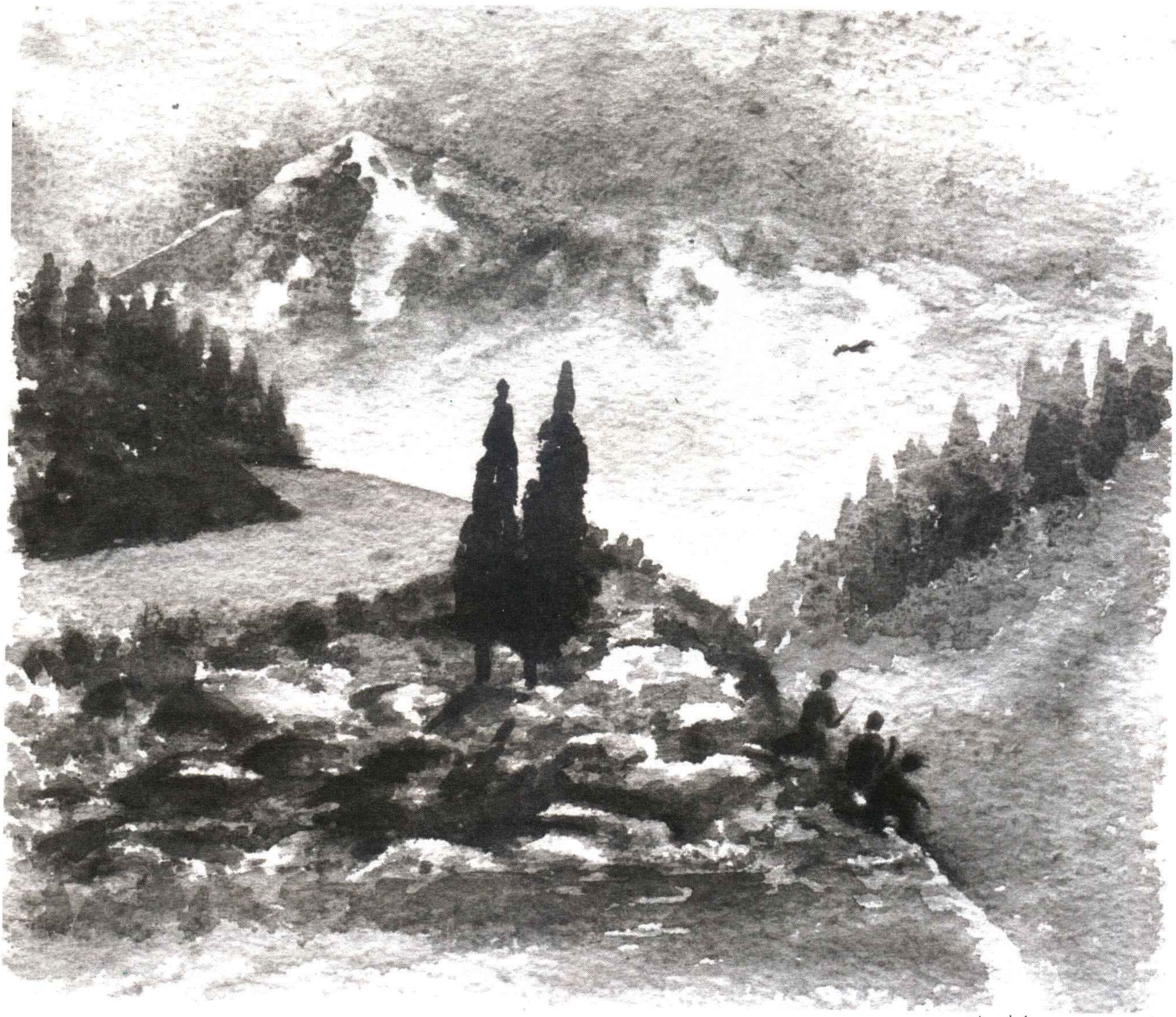

Shabir Santosh

Kashmiriyat

–J. L. Jogi

Kashmiriyat, not long ago, was a splendid way of life in Kashmir. Today it is just a thought for reflection. As such, one needs to recall what W.R. Lawrence wrote in his classic work *The Valley of Kashmir* in 1895 A.D. 'The foreigners', he says:

> ... call Kashmiris Pir Parast (saint worshippers) and the epithet is well deserved. Every Kashmiri believes that saints will aid if men will call and that a dead saint is more efficacious than a living priest. Further, all the veneration in Kashmiri character comes out as a Musalmaan approaches a shrine, makes low obeisances, walks barefoot to the doorway, smears his throat and body with the holy dust of the sacred precincts and then gazes at the relics of the dead saint and even at the cave where he had lived his ascetic life. Besides, the Hindus and Musalmaans of Kashmir alike revere certain places in Kashmir. In particular, 'the same imprint of a foot in stone' in Verinag is venerated by Hindus as Vishnu-Pad and by Musalmaans as Kadam-i-Rasool. Muslim shrines and Hindu asthans are found side by side under shady chinars, lofty poplars and elms at various places. Musalmaans, very naturally, seem to have clung with tenderness to their original places of worship after their conversion. Also, the strong rule under which they have lived for generations would brook no conflicts between the two communities. The commonality of ideas behind their similar customs led to a delightful tolerance between the followers of the two religions.

This brilliant and intimate exposition of life in Kashmir, as it existed then, describes the very essence of 'Kashmiriyat'–the glorious tradition of Kashmir.

Kashmiriyat, says Christopher Sneddon, is a term with Perso-Arabic roots and signifies the acceptance of all religions among Kashmiris. **Further, the harmony between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir arose out of their common ethnicity, language, geographical region, and their sufferings under various repressive regimes from Afghans to Dogras. A common racial, cultural and linguistic background coupled with reverence for each other's religious figures and festivals gave rise to this unique trait of Kashmiris** [See Christopher Sneddon, *Kashmir–The Unwritten History*]. For M.J. Akbar, the noted author and historian, Kashmiriyat followed from the life and rule of Zain-ul-Abidin. He maintains the same as the distillation of the spirit of synthesis, understanding and humanism in Kashmir. He cites the example of Mirza Haidar Dughlat, who deviated from Kashmiriyat, equated Islam with majority Sunni sect, desecrated the tomb of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi at Zadibal and thereby committed a fatal mistake. He also maintains that Kashmir can never be ruled well except by the spirit of Kashmiriyat [See M.J. Akbar, *Kashmir–Behind the Vale*).

There is also no denying the fact that for generations, there did exist inter-community differences in Kashmir. 'The overall culture though pluralistic, was however not syncretic,' says the eminent sociologist Prof. T.N. Madan.

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The Pandits and Muslims did not live or dine together. Their life-styles were dissimilar. The places for worship of one community were out of bounds for the other. Traditional dresses of Pandits and Muslims were different and also different was the manner in which they wore them. The long and multi-purpose sleeves of a Pandit pheran drew a contrast with the shorter ones of a Muslim. A Pandit wore the tuck of his turban from right to left but a Muslim did exactly the opposite. Extra-puritanical Pandits avoided touch or contact with others for reasons of defilement. Onions, garlic, tomatoes and dressed chickens could not enter a Pandit's kitchen while Muslims had no such taboos. Pandits used brassware and bronzeware in their kitchens while Muslims used nickled copperware. The culinary styles of both communities were different. However, both communities had many common social customs and practices, an intense love of their language and motherland, a heart-warming hospitality and had a common folklore and folk music [See T.N. Madan, *Valley of Kashmir*, ed., Aparna Rao].

Notably, as events unfolded in Kashmir from time to time, Kashmiriyat too had to suffer severe stresses and strains. But on most occasions, it stood the test of time. The tumultuous events of 1931 A.D. could not have grown into a great and successful movement without giving up its 'Muslim dimension' and amicably including within it the Pandits and others. It was Kashmiriyat which enthused the Pandit leaders to turn back a visiting V.D. Savarkar in 1944 A.D. and so was the case when S.M. Abdullah rebuffed a visiting M.A. Jinnah in the same year. In 1947 A.D. when the country was divided on the basis of religion and communal frenzy was at its worst, Kashmir remained free from communal violence and later in October of that year, all communities joined hands to defeat the designs of the invaders from Pakistan. Again, in 1965 A.D., Kashmiris rose as one man against the armed and well-trained infiltrators sent in by Pakistan to cause sabotage, destruction and an eventual guerrilla war in Kashmir to finally annex it with Pakistan. Kashmiriyat again stood in the forefront and there was no communal assault on the minority Pandits. Even during the turbulent days in 1963 A.D., when the holy Moe-Muqaddas had disappeared from the Hazratbal shrine, there was no communal anger and even the Pandits, led by Dr. Karan Singh, organized prayers in the temples for the restoration of the holy relic.

As one recalls, Kashmir saw happier times during the decades of 50s to 70s A.D. except for short durations of Indo-Pak wars. Though for more than a decade, Abdullah's continued detention was a matter of embarrassment, yet life in general was peaceful in Kashmir. Pandits lived and worked fearlessly in the remote areas of the valley. Popular rule had taken a firm root and pro-Pakistan elements remained marginalized. Farmers had become landowners and orchardists had no limit on their holdings. Trade had increased both in volume and kind. Tourism had picked up and so had the entrepreneurship connected with it. The overall economic situation was better. Educational institutions were full and brimming with activity. Female education was highly encouraged. Majority-minority complex in the society was on the wane. New and modern ideas and trends had set in. Puritanism of the Hindus and obscurantism of Muslims had largely receded into the background. Young boys and girls had adopted new dress codes. Cinema and other cultural entertainment were immensely popular. Muslims and Hindus joined in each others' festivities. Purdah and Burqa nearly disappeared.

The life-styles of both the communities too had changed considerably. Modern furniture, cutlery and crockery had entered most households and inter-dining at various festivities had begun. Fairs and festivals were held with traditional gaiety and fervour. Shikaras ferried the locals and the tourists on the placid Dal Lake in cool breeze and trekkers and hitch-hikers took to the remoter valleys in the mountains without any let or hindrance. Sports and aquatics were highly patronised. A grand university campus had come up at the picturesque site on the western bank of the Dal Lake. Mughal Gardens and other beautiful resorts had become the favourite holiday destinations of the local people. There was a feeling of freedom and romance in the air. Kashmiriyat appeared at its best. It is, however, also true that many young Kashmiris, mostly Pandits, had to leave Kashmir for better education and jobs for reasons of positive discrimination in favour of poorer Muslims. However, both Hindus and Muslims lived and worked happily.

Historically, after Islam entered Kashmir, a new phase of life began for its people. The arrival of theologians and litterateurs from outside led to a new blending and harmonising of a composite culture. Though Sanskrit learning began to languish, it was not abandoned altogether. Sanskrit and Persian languages existed side by side for a long time. The bilingual inscription both in Sanskrit and Persian on the tomb of Sayyad Hassan, put up in 1484 A.D., inside the cemetery of Bahauddin Saheb in Srinagar bore a clear testimony to this fact. Sheikh Hamza Makhdum's *Wasiyatnama*, written in the 16th century on birch-bark, was both in Sanskrit and Persian. Though not available now, it was preserved for a long time in the museum at Srinagar. Sanskrit lexicon received many Persian words like 'khatona' (khatun), 'khangaha' (khankah), etc. Jonaraja wrote *Dwitiya Rajatarangini* during Zain-ul-Abidin's rule. He also wrote a commentary on Mankha's *Srikantha-Charita*. His pupil Srivara wrote *Jaina-Rajatarangini* covering the period of Zain-ul-Abidin. He translated Jami's *Yusuf-Zulaikha* into Sanskrit. Prajyabhatta wrote *Rajavalipataka* and his pupil Suka brought the narrative down to 1596 A.D. Jagadhar Bhatt, in 1450 A.D., wrote *Kusumanjali* in praise of Lord Siva. He also composed *Balabodhini* based upon the Katantra School of Grammar in 1475 A.D. Vardharaja wrote a commentary on Siva-Sutras. Such encouragement of Sanskrit language and learning under most Sultans, barring a few atrocious and fanatic ones, was a great step towards promoting Kashmiriyat.

Though Kashmir had cultural relations with Persia even before the Sultanate period yet the dominant note in its culture remained Indian. As Persian influence increased, Sanskrit receded into the background. However, the Brahmins took to Persian language and contributed significantly to its literature. While Yodhbhatta mastered *Shahnama*, Mulla Ahmad, a noble in the court of 'Badshah', translated *Mahabharata* into Persian. Baba Daud Khaki (b. 1521 A.D.) became a disciple of Sheikh Hamza Makhdum. Sheikh Yaqub Sarfi, a Quranic scholar, developed contact with Faizi, Abul Fazal and Badauni and at the behest of both of them Akbar entered Kashmir in 1586 A.D. And thus the masses were relieved of the religious intolerance of Yaqub Shah Chak. As time passed, Hindu and Muslim litterateurs remained attached to their indigenous traditions of the past and the appeal of their natural surroundings and found their inspirations in their common and composite heritage.

The rich Kashmiri language of the masses continued to work as a great binding force between the Hindus and the Muslims. Lal Ded's mystical sayings reflected the mingling of Sanskrit and Persian streams. *Rishinama*, a collection of the mystical sayings of Nund Rishi was compiled under direct inspiration of 'Badshah'. Habba Khatun, during the Chak-period, greatly enriched the Kashmiri poetry. Her love-lyrics filled the people with universal human love. The sayings of Lal Ded and Nund Rishi brought enlightenment all around as Kashmiriyat attained its glory and the society, at large, enjoyed its composite culture.

And today, after more than two decades of strife and sufferings by one and all, Kashmiris continue to love their precious Kashmiriyat and overwhelmingly do not support any division of their state on religious or ethnic lines. They support a safe and dignified return of the Pandits and seek a solution based upon the preservation of their glorious traditions of Kashmiriyat.

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Journey of Mahasu *devta* from *Kashmir to Uttarakhand: An Overview*

–Richa Kamboj

Kashmir, the biggest valley in the Himalayan range, has since times immemorial remained the seat of learning and spiritual attainment. The lofty peaks and mountain ranges of Himalayas have inspired and motivated the pilgrims, learned men and tourists alike.

Rightly described as the abode of gods, it has been the birth place of saints, sages and peers who travelled to far off places to propagate brotherhood, peace and equity. The folklore of Himalayan region is replete with the anecdotes of Kashmir which signify its importance as a spiritual seat of learning.

The most venerated deity of Jaunsar-Bawar region of Uttarakhand is Mahasu. The major temple dedicated to the deity is situated at Hanol in Jaunsar-Bawar *pargana* of the district Dehradun of Uttarakhand. Besides Jaunsar-Bawar, Mahasu Devta is also worshipped in Rawai and Purola. Temples dedicated to this deity can be found in almost every village of Jaunsar-Bawar as well as in the Himalayan belt of the adjoining state of Himachal Pradesh.

Mahasu Devta was a native god of Kashmir. There is a popular legend, with minor variations, prevalent among people which narrates how the deity came to Jaunsar-Bawar from Kashmir. The cult of Mahasu *devta* comprises of four divine brothers known as Basik, Pibasak (pawasi), Buthya or Baitha (Botha) and Chalta or Chalda. The entire Himalayan belt shares environmental affinity and since the latter is the main factor in influencing and shaping the religio-cultural scenario of a place, we find great similarity in thoughts, beliefs, religious practices, art and architecture in this region. Besides this, there had been interaction amongst natives of this region since ages, which served as a staple factor in pollination of religious beliefs and culture within different belts and pockets of the Himalaya, and the journey of Mahasu *devta* from Kashmir to Uttarakhand bears testimony to it.

The cult of Mahasu travelled from Kashmir to Uttarakhand some four or five hundred years ago.[1] According to noted scholar Walton, Una Bhat lived with his large family and relatives in a village called Maindrath. Kirbir Dana (*danav* or demon) used to eat one of his family members daily until Una with his three sons and one daughter escaped to the forests of the Yamuna. One night Mahasu Devta appeared in his dream and advised him to proceed to Kashmir where the four Mahasus dwelt and to destroy Kirbir Dana with their help. Thus Una went to Kashmir and came to the place where Mahasu's watchman lay asleep. He woke him up and addressed him as *mama* (maternal uncle). Being pleased, the watchman told him about the way to Mahasu through the forest of Ghagli and Kanani Tal in Kashmir. Una followed the watchman's instructions and on reaching the abode of Mahasu appealed to him to help him. Mahasu offered him full support to destroy Kirbir. Chalta Mahasu gave him a handful of rice, an earthen vessel and his staff. Una was to strike the staff on the earth causing water to come out and to prepare rice for himself. This

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would also ensure that Mahasu's favour was with him. He was asked to throw some of the rice into the Tons to prevent Kirbir from causing any harm to Una. He was also told to plough his field after employing a heifer to his yoke and ensure that the plough was driven by a bachelor only. By doing so, the plough would turn into gold and his share will turn into silver. On the five furrows ploughed by him, he would find five stone idols of the four Mahasus and their mother, Deolari. Una did as he was instructed. In the first furrow appeared Basik with his thigh transfixed. Pawasi appeared with a wounded ear and Botha with an injured eye. Chalda appeared intact and thus is able to roam whereas the other three are found only in the temples dedicated to them. Una's youngest son became a Deopujari, his second son became a Rajput and the third became a musician. Kirbir Dana was killed by Kalu Bir, the attendant of Mahasu and his head was hung up by him in the temple of Mahasu. Garhwal became a seat of Basik and Pawasi and Jaunsar-Bawar that of Botha and Chalda. There are temples dedicated to Sangru at Mandhan in Khats Koru and Udpalta, whence he is carried to Khats Semalta, Udpalta, Koru and Seli.[2] Near Hanol, across the Tons river, at some distance, there is a temple dedicated to Chalda Mahasu at Thadiyat, in district Uttarkashi.

O. C. Handa also mentions a similar legend but with slight variation.[3] According to him the man who lived in Bawar was Huna Bhat. Out of his seven sons, six were consumed by the demon Karbir. Huna saw in his dream four great warriors who were in the army of the king of Kashmir who were powerful enough to kill Karbir. A Brahman of Hatkoti, named Naga, directed him on the way to Kashmir. When he started his journey, he abruptly felt very light, filled with energy and vigour. His eyes blinked and the next moment he found himself standing near a water spring. Mahasu *devta* was supposed to live beneath this water spring. A divine being guarding the spring, who was the *wazir* of Mahasu *devta* called Shedkulia, appeared before him. Huna addressed him as *mama*(maternal uncle). The rest of the legend follows the details cited above.

Besides the four Mahasus, their pantheon comprises of their polyandrous wife, Natari and their mother Deoladi. The Mahasus have four attendants called *birs*-Kapal, Kaulu, Kailath (Kaniasana) and Shedkulia. They in turn have four *balyayinis* meaning female helpers, who reside at Daraghat below Tuni. There is a temple which is dedicated to Deoladi at Maindrath.[4]

According to another belief prevalent in the region, Uttarakhand was tortured by demons in the beginning of Kaliyuga. The most powerful among them, Kirmar devoured all the seven sons of the Huna *rishi*. The demon wanted to have the wife of Huna, named Kirtak. The *rishi* prayed to Siva to protect her. Thus Siva punished the demon by making him blind. Then they evoked the Hiteshwari Devi of Hatkoti, *asthtbhuji* Durga. The latter asked them to go to Kashmir and to seek Lord Siva's favour by offering him prayers which he did. Siva was pleased and promised the destruction of the demons. He was also asked to appease the *devi* with rituals and prayers on his return. Consequently the goddess appeared encircled with flames and gods appeared from different parts of her body. According to the prediction made by Siva, the four gods to appear are known as the Mahasus, who killed all the demons.[5]

Mahasu Devta might be a Nag deity as per another legend related to Brahmanical tradition which alludes its origin to the latter.[6] According to this, a man was ploughing his field in the *pargana* Bucan, when abruptly a snake appeared before him and told him that he was sent by the divinity called Mahasu *devta* and asked him to install his idol. The snake further said it would reveal to him the laws that were to be obeyed. About another legend Walton writes that Una was told by the watchman that after crossing the forest of Ghagti 'he would next reach Kanani Tal, the lake of Kanana, into which he was to spit and throw some of his hair. If his saliva turned into cowries and his hair into snakes, he would know that he was in the miracle-working land of Kashmir.'[7] Here again we get reference of snakes.

(continued on page 34)

Burzahom

–Vidhu Ganjoor & Buzz Burza

About 24 kilometers northeast of the ancient metropolis of Srinagar lies one of the most premier archeological excavations ever unearthed. It is located in the Vale of Kashmir, the long secluded, 75 by 25 kilometer lake bed of an ancient inland sea that contains much of the population of Kashmir.

The initial archeological excavations at Burzahom were begun during the 1930s when South Asia was spared the economic ruin that was causing so much consternation in the industrialized West. Initially the findings in this pastoral valley were mistakenly thought to be Harappan, the main South Asian period whose population centered on the River Indus to the west and south of Burzahom. Rather this simplistic explanation was proved to be wrong in the most noteworthy of ways.

Subsequent excavations several decades later discovered the errors of these earlier findings. Yale and Cambridge Universities' jointly sponsored expedition in the 1950s proved that this major Neolithic site is the earliest settlements in Kashmir so far discovered. Their findings date the site from 3000 BC.

Burzahom became the focus of one of the mainstays of the Indian Archeological Survey. During a decade-long period beginning in the 1960s, major excavations were undertaken. Sadly, the bulk of the findings of this major site have been locked up in the Purana Qila in New Delhi for many years. Recent press reports detailed dissatisfaction on the part of original participants in the IAS excavations. They feel the significance of their findings have not received proper attention nor have the artifacts uncovered been given the proper care.

The Neolithic people of Burzahom are probably the earliest inhabitants of Kashmir and the site marks the first stage of known settled population in Kashmir. It is the first site of the Late Stone Age; Burzahom is the best-known Neolithic site in South Asia.

Late Stone Age sites are considered Neolithic only when there is a positive evidence of not only permanent settlement but also significant economic development that is beyond the traditional agrarian pursuits of hunting, fishing and the gathering of food stuffs. In short, what was going is the beginning of urban civilization. Cities are where schools, hospitals, libraries and government are located. Cities are where food comes to man allowing mankind the leisure time to blossom. Cities are the greatest work of man.

The Neolithic people of Burzahom are possibly the earliest inhabitants of the area and the site marks the first stage of known settled population in Kashmir. It is the first known site of the late Stone Age

The history of Burzahom is divided into periods I, II and III. During the first period, people lived in pits with mud-plastered walls and thatched covers over the mouth above. The pottery was hand-made, gray, dull red or brown

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and consisted of dishes, bowls, pots, and vases. Although they were articles possessing utilitarian value, their design had an undeniable artistic fluidity. Some of the pottery had mat impressed designs at the bottom. During the second period, the inhabitants of Burzahom moved out of the pits and constructed mud or mud brick houses above. These early structures used construction techniques that are in use today. Life became more thoughtful and innovative. Potterydesigns became more refined and a new type of blackware pottery appeared. During the third period, large men hims, which are vertical stone monuments, were erected in Burzahom. These striking structures were found in Asia as well as Europe and Africa.Wheel-made pottery appeared that marked the beginning of early industrial production, This third period continued until 300 AD.

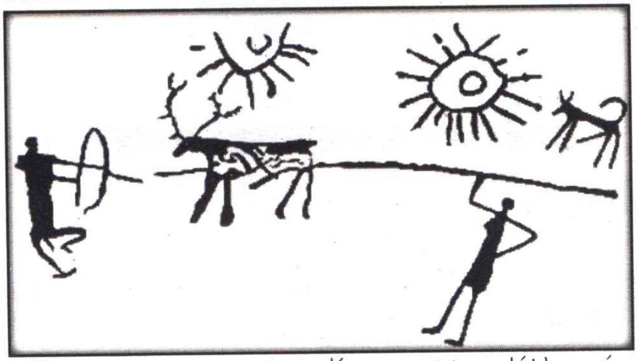

Figure-1: A standing Megalith in Burzahom is a striking example of a widespread design concept found in West Asia, Africa and Europe.

Dogs were sometimes buried with owners in Burzahom, a unique fact not found elsewhere in South Asia. Evidence from graves is the only indication we have about religious beliefs and we know that hunting played a role in burial practices. People would be interned with hunting implements, which could include hunting dogs. A Neolithic hunting scene engraved on a stone slab was found at Burzahom. It shows two hunters, one armed with a bow and arrow, the other with a spear and a wounded deer. A dog is also represented, as are two suns, a possible attempt to show that it took place during the course of the day. Burial customs were similar to those found in Iran at the same period.

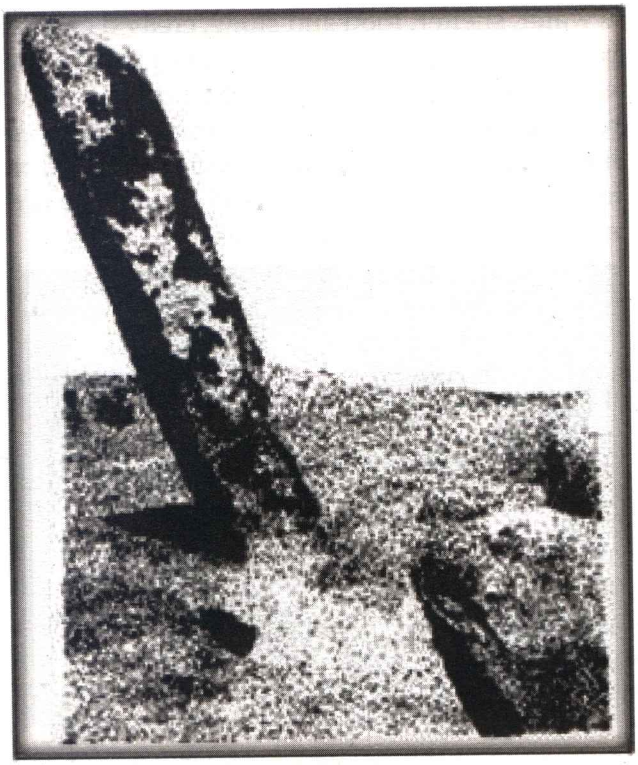

Figure-2: Sketch of a famous drawing of a hunting scene done on a stone slab from Burzahom.

Pottery, copper tools and a jade bead found in Burzahom indicate international trade links with both the Arabian Sea and Central Asia.

Burzahom was located on historical trails that provided access to the then known world. Stimulus from outside contacts brought new crafts from technological discoveries such as pottery, copper and alloys. These first permanent agricultural settlements indicate a highly organized if still relatively simple society that demanded a substantial degree of social discipline and conformity.

The grinding stone was a major Neolithic innovation that allowed tougher and less brittle rocks to be used. Polished stone tools are the insignia of Neolithic culture. Parallel-sided blades were the basic technological innovation of the Upper Paleolithic age. These blades were found in Neolithic sites and were essential equipment until the Iron Age.

Tools were made when and where they were needed and not carried long distance. Abundant raw materials for tool making such as water, shelter, food and stone, created centres for large-scale production. These factory sites are where parties were held which allowed for the exchange of technology and information between different people. This is a worldwide phenomenon and is how progress was made and had far-reaching social and economic effects.

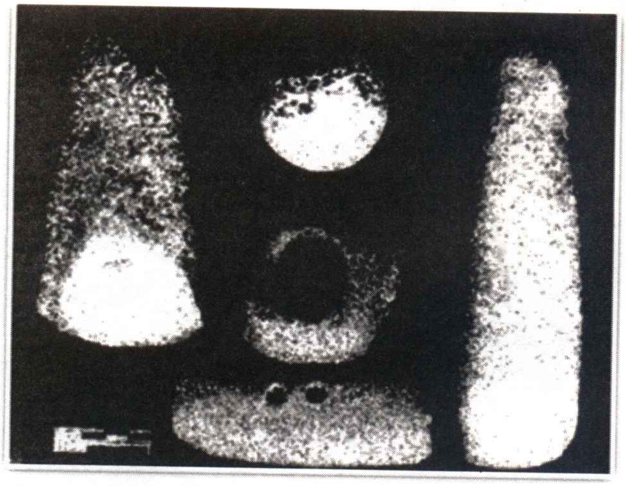

Figure-3: These polished stone tools show the developed skills used in tool-making.

Essentially there was a continuous development in the character of human culture throughout the Paleolithic period in South Asia. Fortification was common but absence of weapons indicates it was merely a style. Recently there is a swing towards considering past cultures in their totality. Sadly, archaeological thinking in South Asia has been isolated because of the relatively few foreign excavations that have taken place here. Hopefully this can and will change.

|| Samvedana ||
culture & heritage trust

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Mahasu is also believed to be a tantric manifestation of Maha Shiv. This probability cannot be denied. Socio-cultural history is replete with such examples when the original names got transformed and their *apabhramsa* forms became popular. Besides, a nag or a serpent is often depicted with Siva[8] and the Nag element is present in the Mahasu cult suggesting some link between these two deities.

Undoubtably, Mahasu was a Naga deity having its origin in Kashmir. Handa points to similarity between Mahasu and Bhagasu Naga near Dharamshala and that the Mahasu brothers are collectively known as the Naga-Chauth.

There is a small temple of Vishnu outside the Mahasu temple at Hanol where, according to a popular belief, Vishnu was defeated in a battle by the Mahasus and thus was given a secondary place. There is a wooden temple dedicated to Mahasu Devta at Hanol in Jaunsar-Bawar and at Pujaili, situated on Naingaon-Rajgarhi bus route near Barkot. During a visit to Pujaili, the author was told by the temple priest that it is presently known as Raghunath temple. A temple dedicated to Mahasu *devta* is situated at Lakhwar in Uttarakhand.

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2. *Ibid.*p.93
3. Handa, O.C.,*Temple Architecture of Western Himalayas: Wooden Temples* (Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2001), pp.73-74
4. *Ibid.*p.75
5. Jain, Madhu, *The Abode of Mahasu, Cults and Symbols in Jaunsar-Bawar in the mid-Himalayas*(Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1995), pp.65-67
6. The legend was first recorded by Hamilton and reproduced by Walton, *op.cit.*pp.93-94
7. Handa, *op.cit.*pp.91-92
8. N.P. Joshi mentions the first appearance of a snake with a Siva image in 6th century A.D. See Joshi, N.P. *Bhartiya Murti Vigyan*(Hindi) (Bihar Rashtriya Bhasha Parishad, Patna), p.44

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Kashmir Snowfall and the Tales of Yore

–Ezabir Ali

Sitting by the fire place, sipping kandi chai, I watched the first major snowfall of Chilaikalan in Srinagar from the huge Venetian window panes of my drawing room. Everything started slowly getting covered with snow as though a white blanket was enveloping it all. The scene looked so pure, serene and beautiful that I just couldn't stop admiring it.

Despite being mesmerized by the beauty, there was a constant lurking fear at the back of my mind... Ah! Now that it is snowing, the electricity may go off any moment which meant no electric blankets and so no warm bed at night, no hot water running in the taps and no lights. I was constantly thinking of these related problems that make Kashmir winter such a depressing season. My only hope of survival through all this was relying on invertors or generators for a back-up.

Over a period of time, all Kashmiris have mastered the art of generating their own back up electricity plans on a small scale by using invertors/generators, etc.

I couldn't help but wish we also had modern technologies and facilities like most of the foreign countries where life runs normally despite very harsh winter conditions.

My wavering thoughts took me to my childhood. I was filled with nostalgia, I remembered how despite the limited modern technology (since invertors and generators were not so common in use in those days) we would enjoy the harsh winters and look at this time as fun-filled time–a time of playing harmless pranks, a time of making snowmen, a time of cooking exotic dishes like *pachin, hogadh, phareh, wangan hach,* tamato *hach,* etc.

I remembered how I and my brothers would impatiently wait for winters to experience snowfall. I guess this enthusiasm had something to do with the fact that we had spent most of our childhood outside the country (in Africa) and whenever anyone there would ask us–what is snow like?–we wouldn't know how to describe it, as we had never experienced winters in Kashmir.

This being the basis of our enthusiasm, whenever it would snow, we would be amongst the first ones to be out, touching it, feeling it, enjoying it. I still remember everyone would sit indoors and prefer watching it from there like I was doing now.

Someone has said the child in you never dies. While admiring the snowflakes piling up, I wondered where the child in me had gone. I was only focusing on the woes associated with the snow now.

As I looked out of the window, I could see the mountain range behind our house had got completely covered with a thick blanket of snow. My thoughts took a long flight and I remembered

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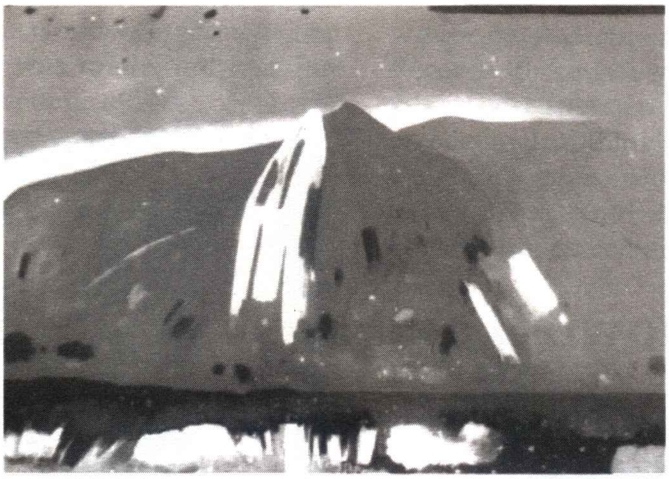
how in my childhood, huddled around candles and gas lamps in the long winter evenings, while munching on *mishr makai* (roasted maize) my grandmother would narrate stories about strange creatures.

These creatures weren't any fairy tale characters that would help me romanticize about life but creatures that were dark and scary. I still remember a few names 'bramm bramm choeq', 'Vaii woff', 'Yech', and 'Sheen Pep'in'. Even naming them right now sends a chill down my spine, as I recollect how scared I would be listening to these stories on dark wintry evenings. I would imagine these strange creatures with a lighted candle on the head calling out my name to come and join them in the mountains. I think my grandmother (God bless her soul) was an excellent story teller; she would have us glued to her fascinating style of narration.



A. K. Raina

The art of storytelling is to some extent long over in Kashmir as most of us live in unitary family systems where grandparents are generally missing from the scene. The youngsters nowadays have no clue about famous stories that would depict our culture, language and tradition. The children of modern times live in the virtual world of electronics and for them computer and internet is the main source of knowledge.

I remembered many interesting stories that I had heard in my childhood like Arnimal, Shoeq Pachin, Soen Kesar which most of the current breed is unaware of.

Some time back I decided to take this up as a project at my personal level and look for people in urban and rural areas who have the skill of storytelling. I remember discussing it with some office bearers of Adbi Markaz Kamraz to do something about this dying art, but unfortunately neither did I come across any person who remembered these fables nor did the Markaz find it an interesting idea. My passion for doing this made me come across some stories on the internet but these had been written in a different way. I had earnestly wanted to compile them. It was disappointing.

I forcefully brought my disturbing thought to a close and tried to re-focus on the beauty of the snow all around.

I decided to re-live some beautiful moments of the past and thus give the child in me a chance. I made up my mind to make a snowman as soon as the snow stops.

I recollected how I had mastered the art of creating beautiful creatures with snow and I decided to give it one more shot...

Ye path wan ye sheen'ech khudaiye ye rotul
Kunei pahri pawor te' aeth manz ye aadam
Mae gov bronth aennus andar paan deu'thum
Mae won'mas ne keinh ... teer hish chas sanemets
Wohaan chus dil'uk naar haraan aechan manz
Wouth'an peth muna'jaat ches taar-e-gamaet

—Rahman Rahi

Miraas embodies the best of Kashmiri culture and heritage.

Support it both morally and materially to help it to survive, grow and flourish.

* * *

Radhakrishna's Cat

–Deepak Kaul

When the new bride stepped into Vasudev's house, the first instruction she received was this, 'Look, dear, you must remember one thing: never talk to one particular woman in the neighbourhood. Her name is Poshikuj. For one thing, she has an evil eye and then she takes great delight in prying into others' affairs and making mischief. The witch is always stuck to her post at the window!' But the new bride did not believe any of this. She attributed the warning to the usual personal animosity between neighbours.

Poshikuj was a well-known character here. The whole neighbourhood feared her evil eye. If they saw her sitting at her window, mothers would not let their children leave for school; they would even stop their husbands from leaving for office lest they fall victim to her infamous evil eye. If it was getting late, one of the women would go up to Poshikuj at the window, draw her into conversation to distract her from her watch, till the men and children left, guarded from the evil eye.

Poshikuj sat at her window through the day and moved away only when the night-watchman came out on his rounds. From her vantage point she came to know everything that went on in the neighbourhood. Who went where, who brought what–she had to know it all. Missing out on even one occurrence would make her suffer agonies of deprivation. She would know no rest till she had extracted the information from someone young or old. So addicted was she to this pastime that 'not knowing' would leave her unable to sleep, tossing and turning the whole night.

Actually she was very good in ferreting out secrets, important or unimportant. Even though the women knew that engaging in conversation with Poshikuj would certainly end up with their blurting out something to her, which was as good as proclaiming it in the public square, her spell was so strong that they lost their normal discretionary powers in her presence. Of course they would tell her, 'Mind you Auntie, keep it to yourself. No one must ever know that I told you, otherwise I will be in deep trouble!' to which she would retort, 'Oh for heaven's sake! How can you say that? Don't I have the sense to be discreet? Don't I know what to tell and what not? Have you ever found me carrying tales or twisting your words?'

But since making mischief between people was in her nature, she would never miss an opportunity to do so. The very next day she could break the confidence reposed in her and you would see a regular battle rage between a number of women involved. The river bank, the tap in the street, the temple yard or wherever there was a usual gathering of women, would be filled with their battle cries. The commotion would warm the cockles of Poshikuj's heart. She would watch the scene with great satisfaction from her window seat. Then she would intervene like a skilful mediator, and succeed in making them call for a truce. In spite of knowing full well that the fire had been lit by no one else but Poshikuj, they did not dare to protest, just dumbly watch her dousing the flames now. They really were putty in her hands. None had the courage to stand up to the old woman. Even her husband was terrorized by her. The poor man could not get a word in, edgewise, before her. He was an uncomplicated man, straightforward and honest, with a heart and eye free from malice. He would rise at dawn, sit for puja, have his meal, leave for his office, come home, have his tea and leave home again to visit one holy man or another. These rituals of this saintly man never changed. No one in the Mohalla knew him for himself, but he was very well-known as the husband of Poshikuj. In fact, his name in the neighbourhood was, 'Poshikuj's Radhakrishna', no one ever spoke of 'Radhakrishna's Poshikuj'.

Raja Jaikrishan

As far as housework was concerned, it was all done by Poshikuj. Bargaining was another of her special skills for which she had earned a name. From her window she would call out to a milkman, a fishwife or a vegetable seller or any other useful vendor passing by, and ask him or her to come in. Then she would descend to the compound and drive such a hard bargain, haggle so tenaciously that the vendor would run for his or her dear life, swearing never to stray this way ever again. She had to be sure that she was getting full value for her money, and looked so suspiciously at the scales as if she was buying gold and not doing just petty kitchen shopping. On such occasions, a riveting drama would be enacted and all the women of the neighbourhood would come out to watch, one after another. In fact this was what she wanted too. She enjoyed showing off that no mere hawker could get the better of her. Besides, after the hawker had run away, mumbling profanities, she would hold these women in conversation, extracting information about all that went on in the neighbourhood: what did that family receive as gifts at their son's engagement ceremony, why hasn't the daughter of another family gone to her husband's house for such a long time, why doesn't the daughter-in-law of so and so return from her parents', why doesn't the son of that family get married, and things like that. She took great delight in inciting daughter-in-law against mother-in-law, sisters-in-law against each other, feeding their insecurities with little half-truths. It was an activity at which she was past-mistress. She would reinforce her words by swearing upon various gods and goddesses about their veracity.

Since the day the new bride came into Vasudev's house, Poshikuj's spider-like mind had been itching to entice her into her 'parlour'! She wanted to speak to her in private, to warn her of her mother-in-law's wicked ways, advise her not to be misled by her sweet talk into believing that she would be good to her. She was dying to tell her that her mother-in-law had inflicted so much pain on her own mother-in-law while she was alive that she did not deserve to have a docile, gentle daughter-in-law like her and that she should not be so submissive, waiting thus upon her like a maidservant. But she had not found the opportunity so far to dole out this information and 'advice'.

Poshikuj was seated at her window in her usual manner, one day, when suddenly she spied a man walking rather stealthily along the wall, carrying a gaily coloured basket in his right hand. She saw him entering Vasudev's house and though she kept her eyes peeled, she could not see what the basket contained. Over the next few days she tried various means to unravel the mystery of the basket's contents, but she did not succeed. It was the first failure of her life and the thought galled her. Then she decided to accept the challenge, saying to herself, 'If I don't get to the secret of the basket, don't call me Poshikuj!'

The next day she informed her husband, 'Do you know that the basketfuls of gifts keep arriving in Vasudev's house these days? But who sends them is a mystery.' Radhakrishna responded with irritation, 'How should I know? Go and ask them yourself–you are the one who is always poking your nose in other people's affairs! Actually you have nothing to do with your time, that is why your mind has become the devil's workshop.'

But this dressing down by her husband left her unaffected. And the very next moment found her visiting Vasudev's house.

As she crossed the courtyard and entered the hall, she thought she heard whispers and quick movements as if things were being put away hurriedly. Keeping her eyes wide open, she glanced all around the room as she stepped into it. She took her seat and struck a casual conversation with the family: how the weather was changing for the worse, the price of sugar rocketing, vegetables becoming dearer by the day and so on and so forth while her eyes of a sleuth scrutinized all the nooks and corners. But when they revealed nothing, she was deeply disappointed and prepared to leave. But the new bride stopped her with, 'You can't leave without having tea, Auntie, it is almost ready.' So she stayed for tea, but the purpose for which she had come was not served–her visit was fruitless. With heavy steps she returned home and sat at the window, deep in thought. Where could they have hidden that basket? What did it contain? What were they whispering about and trying to hide from her? Her curiosity unsatisfied, there was no peace for her. Her chain of thoughts was broken when she noticed Vasudev's wife leaving her house, a shawl around her shoulders. Obviously she was going visiting and would be out of the house for some time. Soon after, the new bride came out to the tap in the compound, washing something. This was the moment Poshikuj had been waiting for all these weeks. She called out to her, 'Why, my dear, don't you ever drop in? You come from such a noble family, you should build relations with the neighbourhood. Or is it that keeping the company of these people has made you one of them?'

The bride merely said, 'You can see it for yourself, Auntie, the housework never seems to get done! Otherwise I would love to come and spend time with you.' Poshikuj knew now that the bride was basically a simple girl and would be easy to manipulate. Assuming a guileless face, she sweet-talked her into coming up to her window seat. Once they were both seated comfortably, she inquired about her parents and siblings in the most affectionate tone. Shortly after, she said, 'Please keep sitting, I will be back in a minute.'

'Where are you going?' the bride was curious.

'I can't let you go just like this. You must have tea! I am going to the corner store to get some milk,' she said in the most honeyed of tones.

The bride protested that she could not stay for tea, there was no one at home and she had left the door open. But Poshikuj said, 'I will not hear of it! It is not an ordinary occasion for me, you have come to my house for the first time, how can I let you go without tea?' and she left without giving her a chance to resist.

About five minutes after Poshikuj had left, the bride suddenly remembered that she had left her wristwatch at the tap in the compound. She rushed out to look for it, found it and put it on. As she turned to go back to Poshikuj's house, she noticed a shadow lurking in the passage of their own house. She called out loudly, 'Who is there?' There was a thud, as if something heavy had fallen down. Now truly frightened, she screamed, 'Thief! Thief! Please, someone catch him!'

Her cry brought the women of the neighbourhood flocking to their windows. The young and the old began to gather in the compound. Meanwhile, Vasudev's wife came back. Taking the situation in, she began to beat her breast and cry. Everyone was shouting, 'Thief! Thief! Get him!' One of the women taunted a man standing nearby, 'You are a man, after all. Why don't you go and see who it is?' to which she received the reply, 'You don't seem to know, madam, when a thief knows that he is surrounded, he becomes desperate and can do anything. A single blow will reduce me to a heap! You want to see me dead?' and the man slipped away to a corner.

By now it was four in the afternoon and the working men were trickling in from offices. Vasudev, his son and Radhakrishna too arrived on the scene. Vasudev's son picked up a thick staff and walked into the house. He was followed by Vasudev himself and Radhakrishna, both armed with heavy iron rods. Once in, they began to climb the stairs, Radhakrishna yelling, 'Come out, you rogue! I warn you, if you don't show yourself this minute, I will beat you to pulp with this very rod.'

But the thief did not show up. Looking for him took the party to the fourth storey. They went into the large room here which was rather dark, but they went about looking in all parts of it, peering into corners hidden behind piles of stuff dumped there. Suddenly Radhakrishna heard a rustling sound. He shouted, 'Found him! Here, in this corner!' The others rushed to him. They saw the thief, crouching, bundled on a ledge behind a ladder which went up to a gable. Without another thought, Vasudev's muscular son brought the staff down with all his strength on the thief. With an anguished cry the bundle fell down from the ledge. They prodded it and to their horror discovered that it was Poshikuj, in her hand was a gaily coloured basket and some feathers of wild duck were scattered around.

Radhakrishna's face was a study in yellow. He looked as if drenched in turmeric water. A shiver went through his body, making his hands and feet tremble. He stared at his wife, stunned into silence. Vasudev was too amazed to say anything. He could not believe that the old woman could sink to such a depth. The staff had fallen from the hand of his son, who was just looking at Radhakrishna and Poshikuj in wonder. As for Poshikuj, she just kept staring at them, for once shamed into silence.

When the party that had gone up in search of the thief did not come down for quite some time, the women forced some more people to go up and investigate. A whole crowd started on the way up, but were met by the three coming down quickly to intercept them. One from the crowd asked, 'What was it? Was the thief found or not?'

'Yes, he was found,' Radhakrishna said, almost in a whisper, 'Let's go now.' The assembly was not satisfied with this brief answer. They turned to Vasudev, 'Why don't you tell us? Did you find the thief? Who was it?'

'Look, my friends, what we thought was a thief was actually a cat, just a cat,' Vasudev cut the matter short. There was general laughter. But one irrepressible fellow refused to accept this bald statement and asked, 'Why, Sir, was it really a cat?'

Now Vasudev could not control his anger any longer. He shouted, 'Yes, it was a cat! Our neighbour Radhakrishnaji's cat.'

(Translated from the Kashmiri by **Neerja Mattoo)**

(Courtesy : *Kath, Stories from Kashmir*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 145-51)

◆

A Look Can Hurt

–Omkar N. Koul

After some delay the bus started its journey toward Anantnag. I got a place on a seat behind the driver. The bus stopped at Dal Gate where a twenty-two or twenty-three-year old woman got on with her little girl who looked no more than two years of age. The child was holding a packet of potato chips.

The woman looked from the front to the back of the bus and said to her little girl, 'There is no seat vacant.' Indeed there was no vacant seat. There were a couple of passengers making the journey in the standing posture.

She sat on the bonnet (engine cover) on which someone else was already seated. She had no other choice but to sit on the bonnet because nobody gave up their seat for her.

There were times when no one would let women or girls remain standing in a bus. But things are different now. People are aware of their rights now. They know that in a democratic system, men and women enjoy the same rights. She felt the same way.

She sat on the bonnet as if she were sitting comfortably on a regular seat. Her serious demeanour was not able to conceal her delicacy and high-brow background. From time to time I stole glances at her face, as if I wanted to make her acquaintance.

When our glances met I would look away. It seemed to me as if she were a character from a fairy tale who had lost her way and had strayed among ordinary people.

The conductor took her fare. She was going to Awantipore.

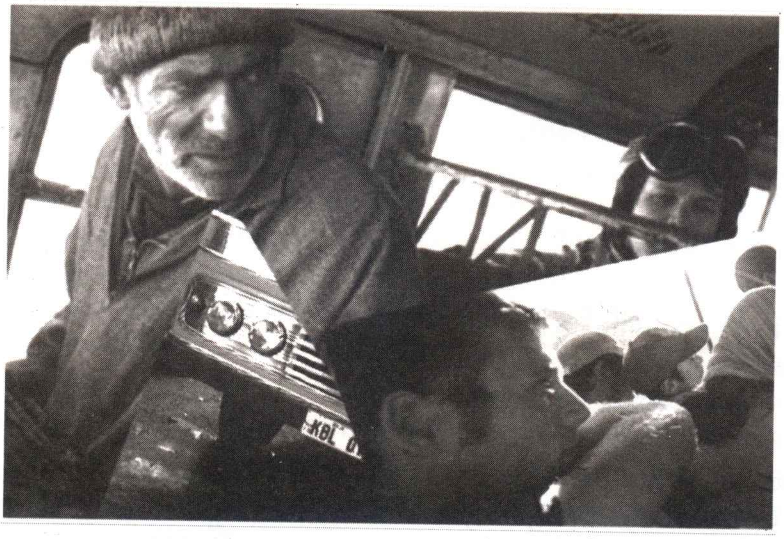
Awantipore? Who would she be going to meet there? Did she have a job there? But what kind of job?

Her light make-up, the arch of her eyebrows, the light pink colour of her face (partly her own and partly made up from powder), the light mascara around her eyes...It seemed that she belonged to a family in which a daughter-in-law would have little to do other than dressing up and sitting around looking pretty. Her husband must have been working in some high-level post and despite being well-educated she must have decided not to work.

These thoughts were hovering in my mind when all of a sudden there ensued some kind of hullabaloo inside the bus. Just as the bus was approaching Batwara, pellet-like stones were thrown at it. Some windows broke and the stones landed up inside the bus. The driver applied the brakes. The woman was thrown down from the bonnet.

Soon there was more noise. The driver kept the bus moving. Half the people were yelling at him to stop and the other half to keep moving. Some passengers got hurt. The woman was hit on her shoulder by a stone and was wounded. She got cuts at several places with the broken pieces of glass.

I stood up and offered her my seat to sit down. The man on my right also got up from



Raja Jaikrishan

his seat and urged me to sit at his place. May be because he saw that I was bleeding too from my left temple where splinters of glass had struck me.

I sat down again. I took out a handkerchief and wiped off the blood. The young man took a kerchief out of his pocket and started wiping the blood from the cuts on her face with it. I did the same.

Over her left eyebrow there was a long cut from a stone. On her right cheek too, and by her ear as well. Blood was coming from all three places.

I took a blank piece of paper out of my bag and tore it into smaller pieces which I applied to the spots where she was bleeding. The man to my right moistened a piece of paper with spittle and put it on the bleeding wound.

She said, 'This shoulder hurts a lot.' I pressed her shoulder to alleviate the pain. The shoulder of her jumper was also stained with blood. Her shoulder must have been hurt inside by a piece of stone. I kept pressing her shoulder for quite a while.

I wondered at the fracas that had taken place all of a sudden.

I hoped it wasn't bad luck brought to her by my earlier gaze. While pressing her shoulder, I asked, 'Does your shoulder still hurt?'

Tears came to her eyes and she began sobbing. Now I felt even worse. To console her, my young neighbour was saying, 'Don't worry! You know we are your brothers. Muslims and Pandits we are all the same. You know, we will protect you with our lives.'

Hearing him say these words tears came to my eyes too. I dabbed at her tears with the clean side of my handkerchief. By now it was completely smeared with blood. I kept looking for a clean spot on it and kept wiping away her tears.

I consoled her saying, 'Don't worry, don't worry ...' I couldn't say anything else. Did I believe that now no more stones would be thrown at the bus? As for her she was in something like a state of shock. She told the young man to sit again in his original place near the window. There was not enough space. He sat leaning against the window.

In a journey lasting only forty minutes how close to one another we had all come. Carefully feeling for them with my fingers, I was plucking the little bits of broken glass out of her little girl's hair. She too was running her fingers through her daughter's hair. The girl was sitting in her lap shocked and terrified. She still had the packet of potato chips in her hand. She offered it to me. Kissing her face, I said, 'Child, you have them.'

The bus reached Awantipore. She got down with the girl. She was unable to look back. I kept looking out of the window. She got down and the bus left. I remembered the cuts on my face and kept rubbing at them with my handkerchief.

I sat there with my eyes closed for a long time and kept ruminating. Did my gaze bring her bad luck?

(Translated by the author with **Peter Hook** from a Kashmiri short story entitled 'tas ma: lej mye: ny nazar' published in *setiisar* (1:101-104), Jammu: Sampreti) 1997.

* * *

Narbu's Dilemma

–B. L. Kaul

Mr. Dorji, a tall and affable Indian Administrative officer, had just been deputed to the Indian High Commission in London for a three-year stint and he was finding it difficult to hire a suitable place to live. Finally, he was helped by an agent to find a five-bed semi- detached house in West Ealing. Once comfortably adjusted, he arranged visas for his wife Stanzin, son Jimmy and daughter Lamo to come over. The first important thing for him to do, he felt, was to get his grown-up children admission into technical colleges in London. Fortunately for him and his children, he succeeded in it.

Petite Stanzin, in keeping with her physique and being used to services of a domestic help in India, was finding it difficult to cope with the household work. Neither Mr. Dorji nor her children helped her. Finally, under pressure from his wife, Mr. Dorji made enquires for obtaining the services of someone but was dismayed to learn that full-time helps were not available in London. Part-time helps were available but they had to be paid wages as per local labour laws which he could not afford. So Stanzin had to manage her household single-handedly and occasionally cajole her husband and children into helping her.

While casually talking to a senior colleague about his wife's difficulty in running the household, Mr. Dorji was pleasantly surprised to know that British rules did allow foreign diplomats to get their own domestic helps from native countries. This is how way was paved for Narbu's arrival in London from his village in the distant Zanskar in trans-Himalayan Ladakh. Narbu, a handsome young man with a ever-smiling face, was tall and lanky. He was a school dropout and had served Mr. Dorji's household for a couple of years in Delhi. An Indian passport and a British visa were arranged for Narbu at Delhi and he was put on a British Airlines flight by Mr. Dorji's friends. Having little knowledge and understanding of English, he was feeling jittery. However, he managed himself well on the flight. He ate food to his fill but could not get a wink of sleep due to anxiety. At Heathrow airport, he was received by pretty Lamo and strapping Jimmy. They boarded a taxi for home in West Ealing.

On their way to home Lamo said, 'Narbu, how was the journey?'

Narbu, feeling half-sleepy, replied inertly, 'It was O.K. but I could not sleep a wink.'

'Why?' asked Jimmy with a smile

'I don't know, just turned and tried but there was no sign of sleep,' said Narbu.

'It must have been due to anxiety,' said Lamo tucking a lock of hair behind her ear.

'Yes, anyway he will make up for his missed sleep at home,' said Jimmy

Narbu was welcomed at home by Mr. Dorji and Stanzin. He was put up in the 5th bedroom in the house. After shower and dinner, he was advised to go to sleep to overcome the jetlag.

Stanzin initially let Narbu get the feel of her household and he soon felt at home. She took him with her to the nearest Tesco store for shopping of the essentials. She also introduced him to Sridhar, the owner of the corner shop 'Lalbaugh' at Kensington Lane.

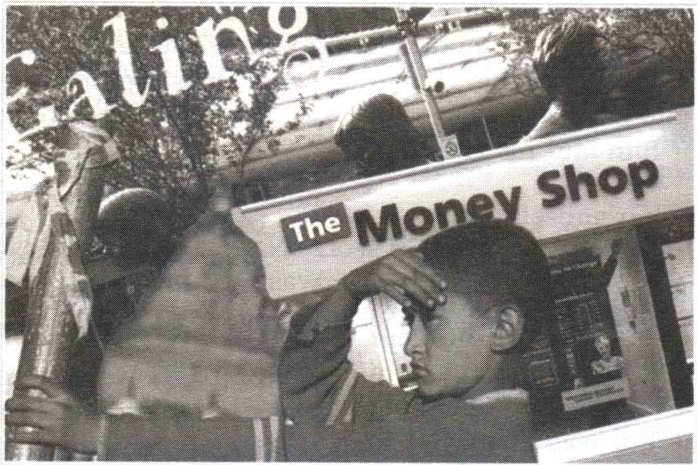
Narbu was surprised at the enormity of everything he came across in London. Huge skyscrapers, large stores with almost everything on open shelves which one could touch and see,wide roads with a continuous stream of vehicles running orderly and not like the mad rush and unruly traffic in Indian cities. It would not be wrong to say that he felt bewildered. When he was free one day, he mentioned this to Jimmy who was nearly his age.

'Jimmy Sahib, I am surprised to see the enormity of things in this place,' he said.

'Narbu, you have to realize that London is a metropolitan city. Nearly ten million people live here and two hundred thousand people come in and go out every day,' said Jimmy.

'How is it all managed?' asked Narbu.

'Well, there are different organizations and departments that look after different activities. It is there in our country also. You have lived in Delhi which is also a metropolitan city. The only difference is that people here are more disciplined and organized,' replied Jimmy. This convinced Narbu and he started to understand the place and its people.



Raja Jaikrishan

Now that Narbu had become familiar with his immediate environment, Stanzin felt confident to occasionally send him for getting things at short notice from the corner store 'Lalbaugh'. On one of his visits to 'Lalbaugh', there was another customer, a Chinese lady, named Suchi. She thought that he was a Chinese boy because of his mongoloid features and tried to initiate a conversation with him in Chinese. Narbu felt nervous and said nothing because he did not understand a word of it. This angered Suchi and she made a face to express displeasure. All that he could speak, besides Hindi and of course Ladakhi, were a few words of English picked up during his brief stay here. Suchi continued to be annoyed with Narbu till one day she saw him with Stanzin. Suchi spoke to her in English and complained about Narbu's behavior. Narbu had mentioned this incident to Stanzin. So she was at pains to explain that they were Indians and understood not a word of Chinese. Suchi apologized and smiled to Narbu for the first time and he too reciprocated with a smile. Thereafter, whenever Suchi and Narbu met, they exchanged greetings, of course, in English.

On a particular evening after a tiring day of work at home, Narbu ventured out into the neighboring park for a stroll. At the centre of the park near the fountain stood a teenage boy and a girl in close embrace with the boy's one hand on the shoulder of his girl-friend. The couple was engrossed and unmindful of the people around them. Narbu had seen this happen for the first time since he had arrived. He felt shocked and instinctively walked away. Back home he mentioned this to Jimmy.

Jimmy smiled, his dimple deepening, and said, 'The western people do not feel anything wrong in the expression of love in a public place. Don't mind it. You will come across such scenes very often not only among whites but also non-whites. Better ignore it.' Narbu was not convinced and felt that the expression of love was a private matter and not for public exhibition. His culture did not approve of it.

Narbu's regular visits to the Indian shop brought him closer to the owner's son Rajesh who occasionally helped his father in running the shop. Rajesh took him in the tube railway to central and other parts of London on weekends and showed him all the places. On one bright Sunday they also had a ride in the London Eye and a boat cruise in the Thames. The only thing he did not like was too much openness and mixing of sexes and monotonous similarity of houses. To him all houses and lanes appeared similar which often confused him and he lost his way a number of times.

Finding Narbu an honest and simple fellow, Sridhar suggested to Stanzin to spare his services to him for a couple of hours every day to clean up the shop for which he would get paid. Stanzin, a lady of generous disposition, agreed for it would give Narbu some additional income besides the paltry salary, from western standards, that she was paying him. Narbu was happy and soon became a known face in the Indian shop in West Ealing.

With an additional income of about three hundred pounds a month, Narbu bought new clothes and shoes and dressed up as a gentleman and soon became a part of the multi-ethnic populace of London. Narbu fell in love with the place. He loved to travel on the juggernaut of London tube railway and soon got used to it. Mr Dorji sent him home once on leave after he had completed one year in London. He also purchased gifts for his near and dear ones. Back home in his village in distant Zanskar, Narbu described in detail to his friends and relatives his experiences many of which were beyond their comprehension. Soon he felt ill at ease and wanted to return to London at the earliest.

Back in London, Narbu got busy in his work at home and the Indian shop. How time flew he did not know. His bank balance had swollen after another shopkeeper also utilized his part-time services against Stanzin's wishes for the obvious reason that Narbu worked less devotedly at home now. In the meanwhile, Mr. Dorji's children completed their technical courses and were employed as trainees. Son Jimmy got a job in an IT company in Leeds and daughter Lamo was recruited by an Indian company dealing in the import of ready-made garments in Manchester. So they had to leave home and find accommodation at their respective places of work. They came home only on weekends.

At the end of his deputation, Mr. Dorji was posted back to India. His son and daughter having been educated and employed, he felt happy and relieved. His posting to London had done him good in all respects. When it was time to wind up, Narbu was asked to wind up too. He had come to London as a helper of Dorji household and would have to go back with them. Narbu was sad. He did not want to go back. The shopkeepers, who had employed him part-time, would love to keep him but they could not do so. It involved many formalities and safeguards as per employment laws which they could ill-afford to do. Narbu felt totally disillusioned. He wanted to stay back but could not do so.

While working in the shops Narbu had developing many friendships. One such friend named Inder Singh, an illegal migrant himself, suggested that he stay back as an illegal migrant like him. The idea appealed to him and he asked Inder where he could stay. Inder suggested that he could stay with him and some other boys at Lawrence Road. But he told him that like other illegal migrants, he would have to change jobs frequently to avoid detection. A few days before the scheduled departure of Dorji family, Narbu did not return home. Mr Dorji and his wife felt greatly perturbed fearing that he may have met with an accident. They decided to wait before reporting the matter to police.

At Lawrence Road residence of Inder Singh and others, Narbu felt extremely uneasy. After dinner, when everybody went to sleep, Narbu felt sad. He could not sleep the whole night. His conscience pricked him and he felt that he had cheated his master who had been nice to him. He also knew that Mr. Dorji was answerable for him. He argued with himself that, after all, this would be an act of disloyalty to his benefactors. Torn between his loyalty to the master and his love for the city of London, Narbu finally decided to return. So while everyone was asleep Narbu got up early in the morning, took a cab and returned home to the great relief of Mrs and Mr. Dorji.

* * *

Photo: Tara Dhar Hasnain

The Name

–Huzaifa Pandit

In all our married life, I doubt whether I had ever seen Farhana happier than that day. Her soft brown eyes seemed to twinkle with little stars of delight while the lips were delicately poised against the glowing face in an expression of absolute joy. It appeared as if she had been surprised to find a world beyond the mundane ordinary one that she had borne with such gravity and fortitude over the years. I found her interaction with others surprisingly carefree and unreserved as if all the ties of decorum and propriety had vanished suddenly into the thin summer breeze that wafted in and out of our window. I had come home exhausted after a trying day at work with a dull headache throbbing at my temples like a chiming bell and the rest of my head appeared to be set in grey lead. So, rather than pausing and inquiring of her cause of happiness, I hurried off to our bedroom for some much needed rest after issuing directions that my tea be brought to the room. After a perfunctory toilet and some staring into the hollow dim glass mirror observing the play of light, I was awoken to the fact that my tea was yet to arrive. I called out Farhana, Farhana, but to no avail. My voice seemed to echo inside the dim lit room and the walls seemed to amplify the ruckus in my head. Growing slightly impatient and considerably irritated, I again called out louder:

Farhanaa....Farhanaaa........Farhanaa.......!!.

I realized that she must be busy tending to the kids and therefore would not have heard me in the resulting din. Kids can be quite challenging at times and ours are particularly gregarious and lively. So I decided to get my tea myself and went down to the kitchen. To my surprise, I found her sitting calmly humming an old melody to herself sunk in some deep thought. I called out sharply, the anger in my voice sharpening my syllable to such a harsh tenor as hurt my ears: I called out to you a million times! I asked for a cup of tea, do you not hear? She looked at me with a puzzled air as if dissecting each harsh syllable of mine and finally said softly: I thought you were calling out to some Farhana. Let me make some tea for you, she added as if in an afterthought. Her reply irritated me further and I bellowed: Ah! Not some Farhana, I was calling out to You, stressing every syllable of the pronoun to carry my point across. She gazed at me with a meditative air and then a shadow of faint amusement crossed her calm face: Ah! You have begun to be forgetful like me! Tchtch.....But, don't worry you will come around. I too have stumbled upon all those memories today..... Suddenly her voice tailed off in the simmering white bubbles of boiling brown tea as some strange melody enticed her gaze into faraway lands of enchanted joy.

My surprise soon gave to worry as I found her behaviour utterly mystifying and incomprehensible. I began to search for explanations and was stuck by strange misgivings: Could it be that some evil being had cast his evil shadow on her and possessed her? I haggled with this misgiving for some uneasy minutes before blurting out hesitantly in a frightened voice, which I hoped would pass off as concern: My dear, are you feeling feverish or something? She glanced at me in surprise and answered in a confident tone: Of course not! I am perfectly alright. Why? I could not find an answer but continued to brood over her strange behaviour in the embrassed silence. Why is Farhana so happy today for no apparent reason? She heard me calling out and yet did not reply, I wonder why? And now babbling and humming to herself! Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!

Farhana by her usual demeanour was quiet and reserved, rarely revealing her emotions. Her speech was curt and to the point, generously supplemented by a quick nod or shake of the head. She would go about her chores with a studious dedication, rarely talking to anyone. She had proved to be a dedicated wife–ever alert to my directions and desires and had rarely given me a chance to complain. In our married life till now, she had never demanded of or complained about anything to me.

My reverie was broken by the soft thud of the clothes being taken out from the almirah and dumped upon the bed. I watched perplexed, as she began to try one dress after another admiring the effect in the mirror. Before I could ask anything, she began to address herself: I think, this red dress shall suit me. I like its almond embroidery and everyone keeps telling me that I look beautiful in red. Yes! I shall wear this–as it is I am very fond of red. I was stunned as each word hit me like a smart punch on my head. What transgressions! What idiocy! Did she not know that I was repulsed by red? Oh yes she knew it. She had a large number of red dresses as part of her trousseau but she had never touched them for fear of offending me.

But she seemed to be enveloped in such a cocoon of pure tranquil bliss that I could not help but gaze on. I was surprised to find myself admiring the graceful contours of her delicately sculpted body as the velvety red seemed to impart it a unique passionate grace. It appeared as if the bloom of pomegranate............Don't I look good? Eh! I was called back from my soliloquy by her question and eventually found my voice: Where do you think you are going? I asked with genuine curiosity, having forgotten my anger for the moment. Why! Did you not read the invitation to Nazima's marriage? She delivered it herself, half an hour before. I had glanced at the invitation card–it was just a routine invitation card, nothing suspicious about it. The same verse before the detail about bride and the bridegroom, the same way of presenting the schedule followed by the ritualistic RSVP, ordinary invitation card paper, a plain white envelope....Ah! I took in a sharp breath as I noticed the name of the invitee on the envelope. It was a short curt name: Fehmida shorn of any surname or honorific. I ran my finger over each alphabet tracing its form with my soft touch and my puzzled tongue as if it were some ancient rune. And finally it came in a sudden bout of realization to me: Farhana's maiden name was Fehmida which we had altered to Farhana after marriage in consultation with our family cleric. Fehmida–the sprightly fleet-footed young girl with flowing black-browish tresses and those large sparkling eyes, shining from her carefree laughter. Marriage had melted her laughter and set her lips in a stern, cold manner with all traces of that old frankness lost somewhere in the transit.It seemed now to be ages since I knew the jovial, merry Fehmida, for she had died soon after our marriage and she had been replaced by the serious stern Farhana.

But today that old Fehmida had been resurrected–there was the same twinkle of childish joy in her hazel eyes and the lips were feverish with the same uncorrupted delight shorn of all artificiality. Today the red seemed to drape her whole being in one unbroken charm of passion, joy and liberty–today the same old rebellious Fehmida stood proudly before me.

(Transcreated from an original Kashmiri story written by **Afroza Rashid**)

* * *

Rahman Rahi

Creation

The door is opened a chink, walk in, I'm within.
The unseen silhouette of springtime breeze, you,
The expectant current hidden in the thickets, me.

I've somewhere met you, so it seems:
The jingle of a footfall in the void,
The beat of wings in the dead of night,
The restless snake slunk into the bush.
Being taken in causes such a hurt, you know.
Hold it! I'll know first who you are.

No, don't shut the door, that puts me out of breath.
There sits an enchantment on your lips.
What madness is this? Don't you see I'm alone?
The lure in your eyes is a huge threat.
I'd rather stretch, but cramped is the room.
Someone give me water,
Your breath is all fire.

God, what a wizard is holding me up!
His arms, supple as the crocus,
His step, the spider on the web,
Now a gamboling deer, now a panting lion.

Forwardness is fine but not to such an extent!
Dissembler! You thought I was free for every one?
Mocked I won't be by the haze of vision not confirmed:
So, man, define yourself.
Can't hold myself.....each pore of my being is burning.

Whither has my mad heart taken flight?
Why can't I reach out to the ground?
What flutter of wings is lapping against my ears?
What dark cave am I falling into?
Must I then quaff up this fountainhead of fire?

So, you have taken me, love!
And I have entwined you, too.
Now no more a god you are, nor I an Eve.
Each glance of yours is wine-washed,
And each beat of my pulse is exhaling stars!
Your brow is wet with the moisture of the earth,
And I've cooled my fingers in the fire of lightnings.
I think the window was shut last night,
Or was it but a web of my fancy?

The hilltops are crimson in the flush of dawn,
And the breeze is nimbly wending its way.
Spring has touched
For the first time.
The flowerbush in the compound,
Each lead aglow with its sap,
Each scented whiff heady
And each swing enhancing its youth.

My heart! Do not disturb the bees.
Let me alone, I am in tender softness today.

(Translated from the Kashmiri by **Mohammad Amin**)

A Wish

The moment I heard it, I thought:
'Looks like a honeybee sucking nectar from flowers.'
But the uncertain heart said, No
It was far away someone
Playing the pipe in vain hope.

●●●●

Only a crevice of lattice-window is open
A small courtyard with chilled soil
Where I could never come across sunshine
I saw an innocent sunny spot beside the despaired wall
(By mere addressing one as 'darling' does not mean being a father)
'An apple plant' I felt upstairs
In the process of planting making trees speak
'Entering the garden
I mulched the jasmine'

●●●●

As if I prayed unwittingly:
Oh, God, do not let her be so acquainted with me
That she might recognize my self
That her sleepy consciousness might get awakened
And through the tone of lyric she might hear what sorrow sounds like

Oh God, let not the presumption plunder her heart
Which puts on a paradisean snake round my neck
Even amongst the jasmine bushes.

(Translated from the Kashmiri by **Majrooh Rashid**)

Basharat Bhat

To You the Believer!

I am a bard
Who sings of compassion
Across time and boundaries.
You may be among the 'pure'
But you cannot choke my voice,
You cannot cage me
For the shackles break
With the warmth of love
With which my notes are replete
Your precepts hardly hold!
You call me impure by faith
While I swear by His Holiness
You call me heretic!
While I die in obedience
Very simple truths
Your blurred vision cannot behold!

You brag of your purity!
And your 'puritan' faith
Unmixed by 'crass elements'
Reproach me
For being elemental!
But what am I to do
While my soul is thirsty for love?

You call me an apostate!
But I remind you
Of a lineage we together carry.
I see the bones
Of our antecedents still strewn
On the sands of Jehlum
And engraved in muddy Karewas
Who once worshipped in faith
The stones and snakes.
Even then this land was
An abode of God
As it is now
When you boast of
Your extreme beliefs
Which evoke aversion rather than love!
We do not reach the Oneness
With the All-Omnipotent
Through rigid precepts
For sure
There are other ways
Which bespeak for us
Across the limits
Of time and space.

Huzaifa Pandit

Colours of Memory

Green is the colour of memory
Specked with shades
Of yellow grey
That walks along the
Twisted road
That leads to the
Weedy lake
Choked by depth
And silent land
Murmuring in silent
Still watery pain
A rotten leaf carried to eternity
Frog croaks its last rites
Fell from a tree on the
Winding road littered
With memory
Chains my cold feet
With tired resignation.

Red is the colour of memory
That is perched on that twig
Where the bats offer blood
To the ripened fruits
That fall dazed to the ground
Drunk on the blood-wine
Tender complexion bruised
With soft wounds.

Grey is the colour of memory
That lies below the grey clouds,
Reflected in the somber concrete
Gravel skinned boiled in tar,
Heat locked in its heart
And the joints of my knees.

Yellow is the colour of memory
That springs from the
Stooped street light
Bitten by moths,
Stung by butterflies
Waging a lonely battle
Against the dark night.
Yellow is the colour of memory
That shrieks out
From the one eyed car
Strikes my eyes in the dark
Yellow reminds me of the lilies
That once grew on my father's grave.

A. N. Dhar

In the Dead of Night

It is dead of night;
all by myself,
I'm rolling in my bed;
I picked up my pen
to jot things down
casually;
however, the shaping
power of imagination
can work a miracle
at this odd hour too,
when one should be
enjoying sound sleep;
who do I remember
suddenly–
the lady of love
who left me for good
to rest in heaven!
I fancy Rupa whispers
these words of comfort
and consolation:
I'm always around you;
why do you feel forlorn?
I am at your service,
beckon me and
I'll hold you in my arms;
you will feel the warm touch,
I assure you!

B. M. Khar

O Ye Human!

Neither the Prophets
Nor the Sages and Seers
Over the millennia of history
Ever uttered the work 'Divide'.

They always beckoned us
To live and let live
For leading a full
And purposeful life.

But why is it
O ye human
That world remains
A divided house?

Of people against people
Races against races
Creeds against creeds
Faith against faith.

You never intended it so
Yet O my Lord!
We remain divided
On anything and everything under the sun.

Many millennia ago
The *Atharva Veda* proclaimed thus:
Sahrdayam sammanasyam
Avidveswam krnomi vah
Anyo anyam abhi haryata
Vatsam jatam ivaghnya
('I bring you freedom from hate
Concord and unity of heart
Love one another as the cow loves
The calf she has borne.')

So said Prophet Muhammad a millennia before the present
To one and all around him:
Lakum Dinukum waliya Din
('To you your faith, to me mine.')
What an irony it is
That everyone here
Is hell bent on
Carrying the Devil's diktat.

Of hatred and animosity
In the name of Lord
Who enjoins upon all
To live in peace and harmony.

A mystic poet named 'Khusrau'
Fed up of perpetual animosity
Within and without
Said thus in anguish to one and all:
Kafir-e-ishqam musalmani mara darkaar neest
Har rag-e-mun taar gashta hajat-e-zunnaar neest
('I am a pagan and a worshipper of love;
the creed (of Muslims) I do not need
Every vein of mine has become taut like a wire;
The (Brahman's) girdle I do not need.')

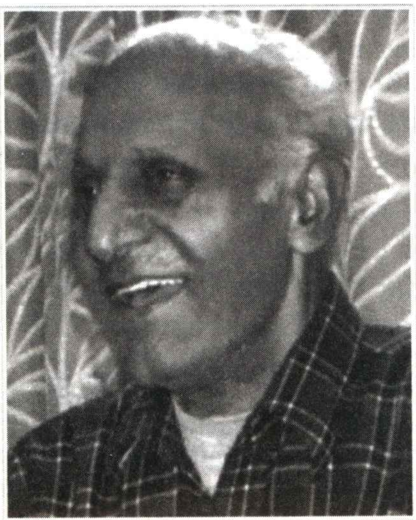
Then why don't we
Like Amir of Amir called 'Khusrau'
Banish the hatred
And indulge in love.

Shama

A Kashmiri Theatre Cat

— Raja Jaikrishan

I feel embarrassed when people call me Braroo Saab.There was only one Braroo Saab–that was R.K. Braroo, my dear departed father. Though I tried hard to be his acolyte, I didn't succeed, for I had not inherited his zing enough.



R.K. Braroo (d.2012)

In this piece I am trying to piece together his theatre journey. His play 'Satraath', presented at Sheetalnath in the early fifties, was inspired by the humiliations suffered by his sister at the hands of her mother-in-law. I learn from his family members that my mother's shawls were worn by the characters of the play.

In 1956, moved by the poor plight of the women, he staged another play 'Haba Khatoon', written by Amin Kamil .

His school mate Bansi Parimoo, who did the set, told me at Srinagar Coffee House (now substituted by a mall) that Mr. Braroo quarrelled with him when he asked for more paint. According to Parimoo, Braroo Saab accused him of pilfering the paint.

In a *Miraas* (Oct.-Dec. 2011) article, Braroo Saab says about Bansi Parimoo's set: 'Just in four days an aesthetically neat and superbly realistic set of three levels, having enough space at each level for the movement of actors and group dancers, was built. After examining the built set from all angles, I deeply admired his vision and artistic feat.'

A firm believer in the triumph of will, he wouldn't tire reciting Azad's lines:

Dil sain ma kar gamgeen afsan paranvale, baigan karnvale;
Avtar tai paigambr yivan ais pathkale;
Taqdeer ha chu insans naiurun ha manz madaans
Yasna tagiy giundun baikar giundan vale.

He never left anything to chance or inspiration. It was always now or never with him. He cleared the IAF flier's test, but was not allowed to join by his ailing mother. The Air Force's loss was the theatre's gain.

Trilok Kaul introduced him to Franz Kafka. A copy of *The Castle* occupied a prominent place in his book-shelf along with Toynbee's two-volume world history and various commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Once pulling out a production album from his almirah, a bunch of brochures fell on the floor. While collecting those I read many times the play title 'Akhree Zeena', an Urdu adaptation of 'The Man Who Wouldn't Like to Go to Heaven' by Amin Kamil with the set design by Trilok Kaul.

I have neither read the original nor seen the adaptation. But Braroo Saab's description of Kaul's set as 'cobweb, red lantern and the door with red, amber and green lights', suggests it was his foray into the Theatre of the Absurd, not Eugene Ionesco's 'The Lesson' (his NSD final year production).

In 1962, Braroo Saab, father of two boys, left for NSD training.

His long spells of absence from home had made me assume a much more responsible role than my pre-teen years permitted.

It was a grey morning of 1965. Braroo Saab left home with the following instructions to me: 'Take a tonga, pick up your mother from her maternal-home, reach Tagore Hall before six, buy tickets and be seated before the curtain rises.'

I did as directed. Mom refused to come along. I reached Tagore Hall and bought the ticket for Rs 5. I was ushered in by people with a smile for they knew me well as I had served umpteen number of tea cups to them at home.

The hall was almost empty. I hopped on the stage and pushed the heavy velvet curtain. I screamed on seeing the image of a dark-suited bearded man in the mirror. The image walked away from the long mirror calling my name. It took me some time to connect the image with the voice of my father. He stubbed the cigarette and directed me to be in the auditorium. The hall started filling up, but being the early bird I was ushered in the third row.

The music of incidental sounds (John Cage) created by the violence unleashed by the teacher on the taught played out my classroom experiences. I was not able to make much of Santosh's entering and exiting strokes on the canvas. But the painting that captured the irrational order of the play completed the box set and is still etched on my mindscape.

The lesson for me was never to seek free entry to theatre. I followed this while working as a reviewer of theatre and films during my stint with *The Tribune*, Chandigarh.

In early eighties, Abhinet was doing 'Murder in the Cathedral' at Tagore Theatre. I reached there minutes after its opening. I asked the ushers for ticket. They looked at me and let me in after a meaningful pause.

His next play was 'Yahoo'. I had heard 'Yahoo' shout in the 'Chahe koi mujhe junglee kahe' song but was not able to figure out its meaning in the title of the play. The bhands of Wahthore, whom I had served tea and snacks at home for months, danced; Ghulam Hasan Sofi sang, Pushkar Wali and Noor Mohamad Lone, both neighbours, performed main characters.

His pet line 'Great art is created in a fit of anger' can be quoted for 'The Lesson' and 'Yahoo'. I had started participating in Sunday children's programme. It was conducted by Shanta Kaul whom I had seen in a dance troupe photograph standing besides Braroo Saab. Though Hasrat Khazanchi, Dad's colleague in Song and Drama Division, prepared me for drama audition, I never got into radio drama.

He joined Song and Drama Division of the Government of India in 1966 as an Assistant Director and retired as Deputy Director.

In 1967 Braroo Saab started rehearsing Ali Mohammad Lone's 'Suya' on the lawns of River View Hotel near Tagore Hall. Krishna Wali was doing Suya's girlfriend. I was doing young Suya.

His community took to streets to shout their piled up grievances against the state government. As the agitation gained momentum, it started affecting the attendance of the cast.

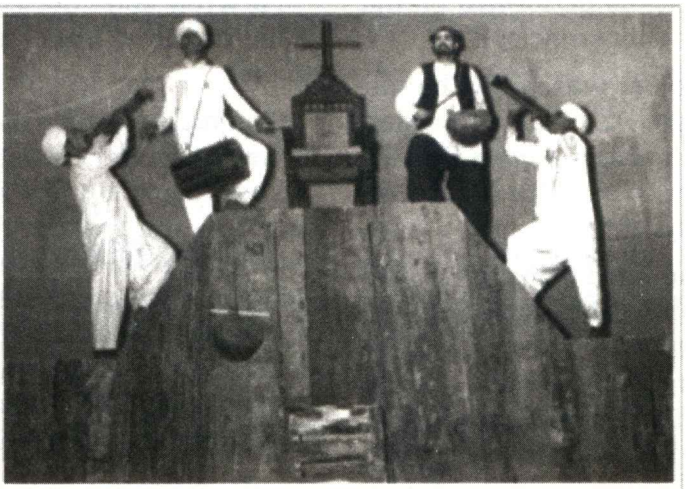
One evening, he asked the cast: What will be your stance in view of the intensifying agitation? I repeated the apprehensions of the rest. His anger widened his eyes and a volley of words shot forth from his mouth which concluded with the sentence: 'Raja, you should say, when nobody will be there in theatre, I will be there.'

The Sheetalnath ground, which was the venue of his early theatre, had now become the headquarters of Kashmiri Pandit agitation. Our house stood on the road and was used by a section of protestors one afternoon. To quell them the police fired teargas shells at them.

The cops came at midnight for my uncle. Braroo Saab accompanied him to Haba Kadal police chowki, with the hope that his Government of India identity card would rescue his brother. The cops refused to oblige and bundled him along with many Pandit agitators in the waiting truck.

The curfew restrictions and the sight of jackboots occupied my thoughts. I helplessly stared at the potholed road.

His friend S. A. Shamim, then an MLA, according to Braroo Saab, moved two cut-motions in the Assembly regarding the unlawful arrests. He had visited him in jail and worked out his release in lieu of an apology, which Braroo Saab didn't sign.


A view of R.K. Braroo's play 'Yahoo' staged in 1965.

He along with many other Pandit heads of departments was transferred out of the state, reportedly on the advice of Chief Minister G.M. Sadiq, an admirer of 'Yahoo'—a cry for justice.

His first stop was Darbhanga. Our home attracted Maithil scholars and writers. Within months he designed and directed a ballet on Vidyapati. I watched the rehearsals and the production and picked a smattering of Maithili.

Some class one artists and Padma awardees–like Rama Shish Pathak (Pakhawaj) and another Pathak whose first name is hard to recall but who was also a Padma awardee and played Khanjri (cymbals)–worked for a pittance in the department.

During the Jhoolan festival (Janmashtami), I accompanied Braroo Saab to the night-long concerts held in the temples maintained by big traders or families of zamindars.

I recall the Dhrupad singing of Ram Chatur Malik and Pt. Omkarnath Thakur for their theatrics. Dad was highly appreciative of his colleague Ramanand Mishra. He was a Kathavachak with Anoop Jalota voice. He had joined the department for the prestige associated with being a Government of India employee.

What he didn't understand in the first go, he mocked it. My 13th birthday celebration was unique. I had recovered from a near fatal illness. He shared the joy of my survival with everybody in the town who was somebody. Some musicians mentioned above also entertained the guests. Dad took the stage and mimicked Rama Shish Pathak.

He abhorred intellectualization and sought workable solutions.

Braroo Saab made a clear distinction between social and aesthetic truth. Like formal education, theatrical skills were power to gain more power by serving the powers that be.

It was Sheikh Abdullah's tenure as the head of the State. The J&K Art and Cultural Academy approached him to direct Dina Nath Nadim's 'Vitasta'. He began preparing for it. Prof S.N. Dasgupta, his NSD teacher, who lived a few blocks away from our Shakarpur house, began making frequent visits. The two discussed the lighting plans for the dance-drama. Santosh started doing set and costume plates. For the departmental urgencies, he was not able to rehearse the ballet in Srinagar. The ballet was directed by Pran Kishore and Moti Lal Kemmu.

After a very brief stint at Shimla, he moved to Delhi. Here he became part of the mass communication project called Sound and Light conceived by Lt. Col. H.V. Gupte, Director, Song and Drama Division. It was an intelligent improvisation on the Philips-run *son et lumiere* at the Red Fort.

The historical structures acted as the backdrop of the performance, much like the productions of Alkazi's 'Andha Yug' and 'Tughlaq' at

Ferozeshah Kotla. The actors performed on the recorded track and the panoramic set.

The first of this project was 'Jag Chanan Hoiya' at Company Bagh, Amritsar. I travelled in T-shirt and shorts in Amritsar–Poona Express in general compartment to see Dad. I reached the venue at the time the entry started.

The show had been mounted to mark the 500th anniversary of Guru Nanak. The title came from the Vani verse *Jad Nanak Pragatiya, Mititund tae jag chanan hoiya*. In Chandigarh, publicity hands of Punjab government like Bhagh Singh Sindra treated me with more respect for being the son of Braroo Saab, co-creator of 'Jag Chanan Hoiya'.

The presentation had ingredients of a Bollywood film-story told in episodes through song and dance. It worked on the trust in the audience's ability to construct visuals from suggestive light and sound effects. Husain describes this as the sense of abstraction which perceives a vermilion dot as an idol or a woman. Though the sound perspective was flat, it worked with the audience and gave a healthy competition to 'Nanak Nam Jahaj Hai' film with legendary Prithviraj Kapoor and I.S. Johar in the cast. The show I witnessed was 115th.

The next stop of Sound and Light platoon was Hari Parbat in Srinagar. 'Asi Aaes Asi Aasav', was an account of Kashmir as witnessed by the Himalaya mountain. Braroo Saab would make breezy visits to Sheetal Nath home where preparations for our sacred thread ceremony were in full swing—no less than the big fat Indian wedding.

According to S&DD site, 'There are three Sound & Light Units one each at Delhi, Bangalore and Allahabad. This medium is used to educate the masses in general and youth in particular regarding cultural heritage of the country, lives, teachings and philosophies of great personalities and imparting knowledge regarding major historical events.'

Involvement of local artists and technicians ranging between 100 and 120 is one of the most significant aspects of this activity.

He wrote and directed sound and light shows 'Shehnshah Akbar' and 'Beghum Hazrat Mahal'.

One night, during the Janata Party rule, Mr. Braroo and I did not return home for the night. He was home in the wee hours and was asleep when I rang the doorbell around 10. I was returning from police lock-up and he from the Red Fort. I along with Iranian students had protested on the arrival of Shah of Iran and he entertained him with the sound and light programme 'Shehanshah Akbar'.

Earlier, I had noticed my idol M.F. Husain rising from the crowd after watching the 'Shehanshah Akbar' presentation at Mehrauli. The barefoot artist sat with the village crowd in the front row and kept on watching the flood-lit ramparts long after the show.

He often quoted Ghalib to emphasize his point, even in his official notes.

Soon after his retirement militancy gripped his place of birth. Following exodus of his kith and kin from there, he wrote 'Reshver'. Stylistically, it was close to 'Yahoo' and highlighted communal harmony. The play didn't go well with the communally polarized audience. His boyhood dream of taking his play to various parts of the country and abroad remained unfulfilled.

He spent days and nights caring for his long-neglected, ailing wife. On August 21, 2012, the couple was knifed to death in the home they had lived for more than 40 years. A cat of Kashmiri theatre jumped on the firmament.

* * *

In Search of Peace:
A Visit to Islamabad and Muzaffarabad

Omkar N. Koul

On an invitation by the organisers of the 1st Kashmir International Conference of Linguistics held at the Azad Jammu & Kashmir University, Muzaffarabad from May 15-16, 2013, five of us from India (four from the University of Kashmir, namely, Nazir Dhar, Aadil Kak, Musavir Ahmed, Neelofar Wani, and me) got seven days visa to visit Muzaffarabad. Our air tickets were booked for leaving Delhi on the 11th May and returning on the 18th.

While boarding the PIA (Pakistan International Airlines) flight from Delhi for Lahore, apprehensions expressed by my family due to certain recent security concerns crossed my mind. My family did not want me to undertake the journey.

On entering the aircraft, the young and beautiful air hostesses dressed in *salwar kameez* welcomed the passengers with smiles. They were very cordial while serving refreshments. Besides a few Pakistanis returning home, the passengers included a few from India, some from Muslim countries including Afghanistan and some from Europe. The airhostesses took two of us (Nazir Dhar sporting a short beard and me) as Pakistanis as they did not give us immigration forms required to be filled-in before landing at Lahore. We had to ask for these forms. An airhostess said smilingly that she thought we were Pakistanis! In 50 minutes we landed in Lahore. We collected our baggage and had to wait for nearly three hours to catch the connecting PIA flight to Islamabad. It was the day of voting in Pakistan. There weren't many people at the airport.

While waiting at the Lahore departure lounge I met one Sharafuddin Katawary from Afghanistan who is a businessman and exports Kashmiri carpets to China and other countries. He is a widely travelled person and has visited India many times. He said he has never gone to school but learned English for his business and travel. The political instability in Afghanistan was primarily responsible for it, but his kids go to school now. As a native speaker of Pashto, he shared some language puzzles with us including the repetition of /w/ sound in six words in a string, i.e., *wa wali walidi wowali wani waliy* meaning 'Mr. Wali, cut the roots of the tree.' **He said he has visited India, including Kashmir, a number of times and has not found any discrimination on the basis of religion. He said that it was merely political propaganda that there were religious restrictions for Muslims in India.**

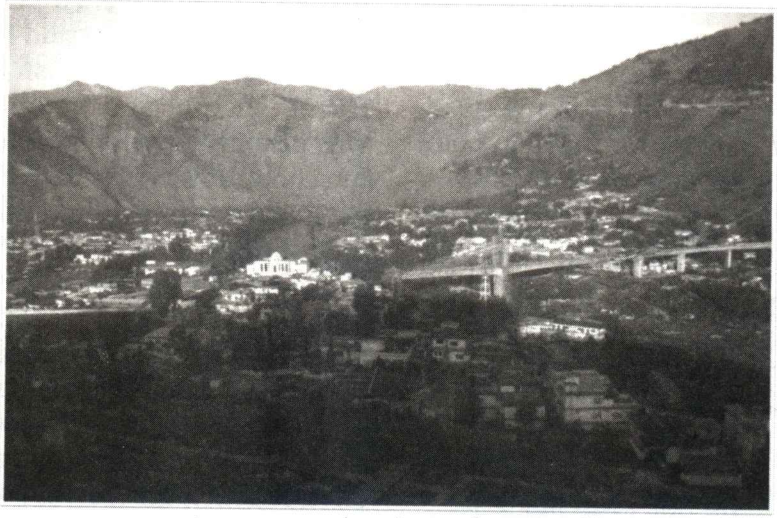
The Lahore-Islamabad flight was delayed by 45 minutes and we reached Islamabad at about 11.15 p.m. Bilal Abbasi, a Lecturer in Management Studies in the University of AJK, was at the Airport to receive us. He took us to Margala Hotel where accommodation was reserved for us.

By the time we checked in the hotel, it was midnight. Rooms were spacious and beautiful. I wanted to go to sleep immediately but others wanted to have dinner first. They ordered quite a few dishes including chicken, *kabab,* mutton, *pulav,* rice, *rotis* etc. for dinner. The chef took about two hours to prepare the food items ordered. We had our dinner at 2 a.m. A lot of food ordered and served on the table was wasted.

I slept at 3 a.m. and woke up at 7 a.m. We went to coffee shop for breakfast at 8 a.m. There was a huge group of young Chinese boys and girls in their sports t-shirts and trousers having their breakfast. They had come to play in Islamabad and were staying in the same hotel. After having breakfast we checked out at 9 a.m. after Bilal Abbasi came from the guest house with the vehicle.

Bilal said that we have been invited by Ambassador Arif Kamal for lunch at 12.15 p.m. Before that he would take us to Daman-e-Koh and other nearby places for sight-seeing. We were supposed to leave for Muzaffarabad after lunch.

We drove straight to Daman-e-Koh Margalla Park through very wide roads, trees and flowers planted all along the roads in Islamabad. The ride to uphill Daman-e-Koh reminded me of the drive to Shankaracharya hill in Srinagar. It has almost the same height. Near the parking site there were some shops serving tea and snacks, cold drinks, and souvenirs. One has to walk to the end of the park to an open space to have a look at the city downhill. There were quite a few flower beds on the way. Islamabad looks quite beautiful and green with a few skyscrapers. Bilal provided information about different places including a huge lake in the city. There were tourists from other parts of Pakistan and abroad at the park.



A panoramic view of Muzaffarabad town

The white huge structure which had caught our eye from the top of the mountain is a huge complex of Shah Faisal Masjid. It has an impressive architecture. Previously, it had housed Islamic International University, which has later moved to its own campus. It continues to house a research library of Islamic Studies. The complex attracts a large number of visitors. In the lawns of the complex there is a small memorial built for Zia-ul-Haq, former president of Pakistan, who was killed in an air crash and has been buried there.

After visiting the Shah Faisal Masjid, we went straight to the residence of Ambassador Arif Kamal, whose huge house is adjacent to a hilly suburb. We were received by the host at the entrance of the house. He took us to a spacious living room with sofa sets and chairs around a huge round table with bowls of dry fruit placed on it. Arif Kamal was born in Jammu and had migrated to Pakistan after partition. He is married to Suraiya Kamal of Sopore. They have two daughters who have studied in the UK. One of them is teaching English in Dubai, and the other is working in the corporate sector in Islamabad.

It was a pleasure to interact with Arif Kamal, a scholar of history and culture of the sub-continent. He is a seasoned diplomat who has served Pakistan's Foreign Service for 34 years. He was Pakistani Ambassador to Qatar and Jordan. He has served in many other countries including Russia and held important assignments. He is currently Director of the Global Studies Centre at the Institute of Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad. He has visited India and Jammu and Kashmir state a number of times and his personal library has a lot of books related to history and culture of the South Asian countries. He pulled out a copy of *Neelmat Puran* translated by Ved Kumari Ghai into English. He quoted from this book, and asked us to sign that book for him. I wonder how many of us visiting his home have read the book which is a valuable historical document on ancient Kashmir and its inhabitants.

His wife Suraiya Kamal made a very gracious entry and spoke to all of us in Kashmiri. She led us to the dining hall where the food was laid on the table. She had taken special care in the preparation of the food as she knew that I was a vegetarian. She said they don't get cheese in the market. She had prepared it at home, and cooked it in Kashmiri style. There were quite a few other non-vegetarian dishes including chicken, *kabaab, saag* mutton, etc. She made us comfortable in eating food with our bare hands as we do back home. She kept on serving more helpings as we Kashmiris like to serve and be served at home. She is really an excellent host.

Their pretty daughter Farhat joined us immediately after we had finished eating. She has studied law at Manchester and is working in corporate sector. I asked her why she didn't learn Kashmiri from her mom. She said she regrets it and will make an effort to learn it now. We sat in a corner of the inner hall which has a view of the entire house around. Suraiya Kamal offered to serve Kashmiri salted tea (*noon chay/ sheer chay*) to us. It was a pleasant surprise. We enjoyed the tea and felt at home.

We started for Muzaffarabad after lunch. It took nearly four hours to drive through small towns and dense Murre hills with beautiful view of the mountains on the way. In the small towns on the way we encountered quite a few victory processions of the candidates who had won the elections the previous day. People were shouting slogans with excitement. The Bridge on Jehlum River at Kohala is the border for entering Azad Kashmir. We stopped at the police post and Bilal spoke to the policemen on duty and we proceeded ahead. He did not provide details to the police office about us. Later we learned there was an escort vehicle waiting for us at the border to accompany us to Muzaffarabad. We missed it.

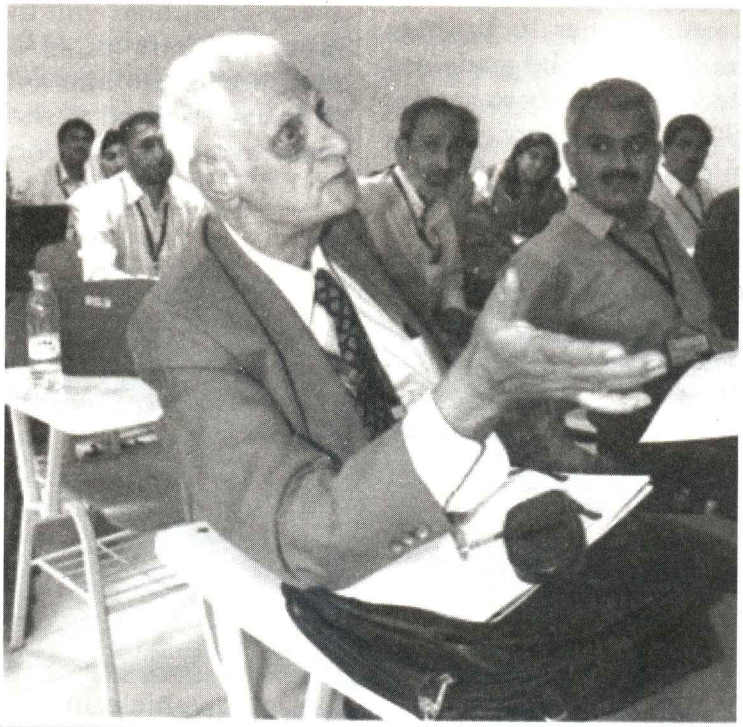
After checking in at the beautiful Pearl Continental Hotel situated on the hill top at Muzaffarabad, Bilal told us that the Dean, Faculty of Arts of the University of AJK would meet us at dinner. We got ready for dinner. Prof Raja Nasim Akhtar, Dean, and Prof Nadeem Bukhari, Head of the Department of English were at the dinner table to welcome us. After having formal introductions, we were briefed about the next day's programme which included our visit to the University, meeting with the faculty of English, lunch with the Vice-Chancellor and dinner with AJK Women for Peace organisation. After dinner we had a chance encounter with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of AJK. Prof Nasim Akhtar introduced us to him and he welcomed us to Muzaffarabad and wished us a very pleasant stay. He sounded very formal and authoritative.

Next morning after waking up I removed the curtains of windows and had an enchanting view of the city in early morning sunshine from the hotel, unfolding a range of mountains, buildings, roads, flowing rivers and bridges. I pulled out my camera and took pictures of what I saw from inside the glass window. Again, while having breakfast, I had a picturesque view of the town from the wide glass windows of the dining hall.

Our escort, Dr Abdul Qadir Khan, an assistant professor of English arrived and we were ready to leave for the university at 9.30 a.m. There was a security vehicle ahead of our 10-seater vehicle in which we had arrived yesterday from Islamabad. There was a five-member security team headed by an Inspector of Police in the security vehicle which included two commandos from the Anti Terrorist Squad dressed in black with caps (like black cats in India) and armed with AK 47 rifles. I felt a little disturbed from inside. I reflected: 'It means they are going to accompany us during the entire period of our stay over here.' And they did. When we started moving, they turned on the buzzer of the vehicle and the traffic on both sides would stop or move sideways for letting our vehicle pass. If there were more people on the road, the commandos would jump from the security vehicle alerting the people on the road and other vehicles to make way for our vehicle.

Out of curiosity, people would stare at the vehicle and try to find out who we were.

The University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, which started in 1980, has two campuses at Muzaffarabad and Kotli and its administrative set-up at Muzaffarabad. Entering the campus we noticed newly constructed single and double-storey buildings spread around. On one corner of the campus there is a memorial in memory of over 100 faculty members, staff and students who were killed in the massive earthquake which shook the area on October 8, 2005. The names of those killed are written on the memorial. The earthquake, which killed about 80,000 people in Muzaffarabad and neighbouring places, had its epicenter behind the towering mountain nearby. There was a huge damage to the buildings, houses and the structures in and around the town. As all the buildings at the campus were turned into a rubble, Turkey and Saudi Arabia came forward to construct all the buildings and many international organisations provided aid to build the infrastructure again. The University is equipped with all the new equipments, laboratories and library and video conferencing facilities. The US and UK governments have provided special resource centres to the University. These facilities were shown to us. The University has an art and design department headed by a young Kashmiri speaking lady born in Neelam valley of the state. It was good to talk to her in Kashmiri.


Prof. O.N. Koul participating in the discussion

One double story block houses all the administrative offices as well as the faculty rooms. Our escort took us to the Dean's office where we met Dr Ayaesha Sohail, Director of the Institute of Languages, with whom we have been in correspondence about the conference. I had seen her charming photographs in the Facebook earlier. She turned out to be much more pleasant, enthusiastic and a sincere person. Her father had migrated from Bhadarwah and she was born in Muzaffarabad. She doesn't speak Kashmiri but is keen to learn it.

We met all other members of English faculty in the office room of Prof Nadeem Bukhari. I presented a set of my books to him for his department's library and he gave copies of recent two issues of their journal *Kashmir Journal of Language Research* to all of us. The journal has an impressive get-up. Papers published in the journal appear to be of good standard. I have not read them yet.

In a formal meeting with the faculty of English in the Committee Room, all the faculty members of the department and five of us provided self-introduction about our academic interests and areas of specialisation. The self-introduction was followed by discussion of academic matters and the structure of the conference. Two members of the English faculty have got their doctorate degrees from the UK in linguistics, and one in the area of World Englishes. Tea was served with local *baghirkhani* and *qulca.*

I was very happy to meet Dr Khwaja Rahman and Dr Mohsin Shakil at the campus. Dr Khwaja

Rahman, who I have known for quite a few years now, had visited us last year in Delhi. Dr Rahman belongs to Neelam valley and lives about a kilometer away from the ancient Sharda temple now in ruins. Sharda, another district, is about three hours away by car from Muzaffarabad, I asked the Dean if it would be possible for us to visit Sharda. He telephoned the authorities and regretted that we would not be allowed due to security reasons and for the lack of prior permission from the government. It was quite disappointing.

I have known Dr Mohsin Shakil, a medical doctor but a scholar of history, culture and languages, for quite a few years now. I met him through internet. I had uploaded some of my papers relating to Kashmiri language at esnips.com. He commented on some of the papers. I learned that he was from Pakistan. He sent me a detailed report of the languages of erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir prepared by him. This report was quite interesting as far as the survey of languages was concerned. He had collected materials from the censuses conducted across borders. I found him later on my facebook too. **When the invitation for the participation in the International Conference on Linguistics came in the last week of December 2012 and I sent my tentative consent, he was the first one to say: 'Welcome to your own Sharda Peeth.' I was not sure if I would be interested or able to participate in the conference at that point of time. His email with the above remark provided some motivation and I started thinking about the conference. It was a great pleasure to meet him in person. He warmly welcomed me to Muzaffarabad. As I was very keen to learn more about Sharda Peeth, he presented a copy of the book *Sharda* written in Urdu by Khwaja Abdul Ghani (elder brother of Khwaja Rahman) and published at Mirpur in 2009.**

We had a lunch meeting with the Vice-Chancellor Prof Syed Dilnawaz Gardezi in his office. Prof Gardezi is an agricultural scientist who has taught at this university earlier. Sporting a long and well-groomed beard, and dressed in cream-colour Pathani dress and waist coat, Prof Gardezi has an impressive personality. He is very soft-spoken and welcomed us affectionately to the University. He was very informal and spoke in Urdu with us. The lunch packets were served at the table. It was interesting to note that the packed lunch had come from some Osma Foods Restaurant. Looking at the name of the restaurant printed on the packets, Nazir Dhar, seating next to me and I exchanged smiles quietly.

We were invited for dinner hosted by AJK Women for Peace at Green Valley, Jalalabad Garden. Mrs. Nayyar Malik, President, Dr Naseema Seema Jogezai, Vice-President and the office bearers of the organisation welcomed us at the hotel. They explained the objectives of the organisation which included enhancing public awareness, promoting and strengthening the social framework, networking, improved communication and mobility. The organisation has conducted two intra-Kashmir across-LoC women's dialogues in 2007 and 2011.

Next morning we visited Pir Chinnasi at an altitude of 2924 meters above the sea level and 32 kilometers eastward of Muzaffarabad. It took about two hours to reach the top of the mountain. There is a government rest-house over there. The weather was cold. After our tea we went further up on the top of the hill to visit the *dargah* of Saint Shah Hussain Bukhari. There are a few small teashops. We met a very old bearded devotee of the *dargah*. He welcomed us and briefed us about the *dargah*.

We had our lunch at the government rest-house. The climate changed all of a sudden. The sky was overcast with clouds. It started raining followed by a heavy hailstorm. Soon the surrounding area was full of a thick layer of hail stones. When the hailstorm stopped, we commenced our journey back. It was very risky to drive downhill. The driver managed to drive slowly and carefully down the slope. It was sunny again in Muzaffarabad.

We visited the local market for shopping. As we were walking through the market escorted by policemen, the shopkeepers and others on the road kept on staring at us. The local escort took us to a cloth shop owned by a Kashmiri speaking person from Sopore settled over here after partition. **While we were in the shop escorted by the commandos, a bearded Kashmiri gentleman in his early forties came to the shop and greeted us. He introduced himself as Bilal from Srinagar who had crossed the LoC in 1990. We introduced ourselves. When he heard my name, he appeared excited and emotional and said, 'I was dying to see a Kashmiri Pandit. It was a great mistake we committed and Kashmiri Pandits too had to suffer. We had three families of Pandits in our neighbourhood. I miss them a lot.' He said he was 23 years old when he joined the movement. He feels restless ever since he came here and wants to go back to his own people in Srinagar at the earliest. On telling him that he can return using the legal channel, he said he has applied but his wife and kids are reluctant. He said almost all those who came here have married local women and have kids. Out of about 3,500 militants who crossed the LoC in 1990, 2,000 have already returned to the valley, 1,000 are settled in different states of Pakistan and about 500 are in Muzaffarabad and some neighbouring areas. He runs a bakery shop. He invited us to his home for a meal which we regretted for lack of time. He left the shop and returned within a few minutes with cans of juice and hot *samosas,* which he offered to all of us including the commandos keeping a watch on us.** In the meantime, one of his friends, a clean-shaven medium-built Nazir appeared. He has come here from Baramula and runs a restaurant nearby. Nazir said he was 17 years old when he crossed the LoC in 1990. He seemed to be happy with his life. He is married to a local woman who is doing M.Phil in English literature at the University. Two days later, at a conference dinner, a *burqa*-clad young woman walked over to me and introduced herself as Nazir's wife. She wanted to have a picture with me.

The dinner was arranged at the lawns of Neelum Valley Hotel by the riverside. It was good to meet Mr. Arif Kamal again, and some senior participants from other parts of Pakistan like Islamabad, Gilgit, Baluchistan, Swat, Rawalpindi, etc. who had come to attend the conference. We had some interaction with a Kashmiri journalist and a representative of a local TV channel.

On the 15th morning at breakfast, I met Prof Paul Kiparsky after a long time. He is active in his research and teaching in linguistics at Stanford. We exchanged notes on the current linguistic research related to Indian languages. He had read some papers related to Kashmiri co-authored by Peter Hook and me and wanted to know about the publication of our joint volume on Kashmiri. In his Keynote Address entitled 'Modeling Syntactic Drift: Grammatical Case and Agreement in Indo-Iranian' delivered after the inauguration of the conference, he had referred to one of our papers.

The inaugural function of the conference was held in a huge hall in the hotel itself. The conference was inaugurated by the president of AJK Sardar Mohammad Yaqoob Khan, who is the Chancellor of the University. He delivered his address in Pahari, his mother-tongue. He spoke in favour of the maintenance and preservation of one's mother-tongue. An English translation of his speech was circulated but he deviated from it and I could understand about 80% of his speech. His Pahari appeared close to Dogri and Punchi. Other speeches were made in English and Urdu. The Minister of Higher Education, a hardcore politician, was the only one who made a political reference to Kashmir. The president wanted to have tea with all the foreigners. I was sitting next to him and I complimented him for making a speech in Pahari. I made a strong plea to him that the government should introduce Pahari and other local languages in the elementary education. He said he would like it to happen.

The inaugural function was followed by the Keynote Address by Prof. Paul Kiparsky. All of us moved to the University Campus for lunch and academic sessions which continued up to 6.30 p.m. There were four parallel sessions. I had to chair one of them. The papers were mostly related to Pakistani English, English Language Teaching, Sociolinguistic Surveys and Structures of Some Local Languages. There was a healthy discussion on the papers presented. The quality of most of the papers presented by senior scholars was good but others needed improvements. As most of the participants and paper presenters were from the English departments of Universities and colleges, their presentations in English were good.

A cultural programme and dinner was organised at the lawns of Neelam Valley Hotel. The cultural programme provided the glimpses of the social life, dresses, songs, dances and skits related to people belonging to different communities, social groups and regions. A typical gentleman was shown dressed in Kashmiri *pheran* holding a *kangri*, others were shown dressed in their regional attires. Some skits and rituals were enacted. People belonging to other communities like Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs were shown in their typical traditional attire. There were songs from different regions. The Punjabi songs spontaneously attracted volunteers from the audience to dance to the tune.

I met Prof Tariq Rehman and his wife at dinner. I have known Prof Rehman, a well-known sociolinguist, for quite some time now. His plenary lecture entitled 'Questioning Myths about Urdu: The Constructions of Language and Political Identities in British India and Implications for Peace in the Present Times' was scheduled at 9 a.m. the next day. He presented the linguistic profile of Pakistan. It was interesting to note that Urdu is spoken natively only by about 7% of population in Pakistan. The language policy and its implementation have several flaws. Prof Rehman has written extensively on the subject.

There were parallel sessions for the presentation of papers till 6.30 p.m. Then we had to move to the Pearl Continental Hotel for a special video conference from abroad, followed by my plenary lecture, valedictory function of the seminar and conference dinner. The video presentation was on the activities of the Foundation of Endangered Languages based in Australia by its president. There were many people present in the conference hall including the vice-chancellor and top officials of the university, top bureaucrats like the chief secretary of the state, secretaries to the government, various departmental heads, and cultural attaché of the American Embassy in Islamabad.

The subject of my plenary lecture 'What Endangers Languages in a Multilingual Situation' was directly related to the theme of the conference. I made a power-point presentation for 30 minutes. The lecture was followed by questions and a good discussion. It was pointed out that as far as the endangerment of minor languages goes, the situation in Pakistan is not different from that in India and other neighbouring countries. It is important to take up necessary preventive measures to arrest the delicate but alarming situation.

My lecture was followed by the Concluding Session chaired by the Chief Secretary. All foreign participants of the conference and selected senior guests were presented mementos. During this function, while thanking the organisers for inviting participants from India, I suggested the vice-chancellor to provide facilities for starting projects on major regional languages like Pahari, preparation of instructional materials in these languages, and for conducting a detailed linguistic survey of the region.

The function was followed by the conference dinner arranged in the spacious beautiful lawns of the hotel overlooking the town with bright lights and scenic beauty late in the evening. There were requests for press, radio and television interviews, which I avoided. I was happy to entertain the requests for photographs with the participants. There were individual photographs and group photographs too. It was resolved to form the Pakistan Association of Linguists. Most of the participants attending the conference became its members.

While participating in different sessions of the conference, discussions with individuals and in social gatherings like cultural programmes, dinners, outings there was an opportunity to have informal discussions regarding the academic and other socio-cultural and political situation. One can make some tentative observations as under:

- English is the preferred language of education. Private English medium schools attract more students than the government schools.
- At the social level Punjabi, Siraiki, Multani, Hindko, Pashto and Sindhi speaking communities use their languages in their families, market place and in social interaction. There is a continuous demand for providing facilities for the academic activities, development of these languages and their use in different domains such as education, administration and mass media. Various non-governmental organisations are making efforts in this regard.
- Urdu being the official language of the country is used in formal domains at the state and national level. Linguistic minorities settled in different states have switched over to the major regional languages for day-to-day communication in all social domains. Tahir Iqbal, a Punjabi speaker from Karachi, said older generation of Punjabis settled in Karachi do speak Punjabi within their community but cannot read and write in this language. Their younger generation does not speak it or are not comfortable with it. I talked to him in Punjabi and he would switch over to Urdu and English very frequently.
- On enquiring about the security situation in Swat from a participant from Swat, who has got his higher education in the UK, I learnt the entire Swat region is under the influence of Taliban. They roam around with their weapons everywhere and are friendly as long as their dictate is followed in the area. The government does not have full control over the situation.
- I was very anxious to know about the economic status of the common people in the state. The pay scales of the university faculty are almost at par with the pay scales in India. On enquiring about the economic status of the common people, an official of the university who was accompanying us to Pir Chinnasi made an interesting statement, 'Here people are rich but the government is poor'. Explaining this further, he said that at least one person of every family works in the Gulf countries and sends money to his family regularly. People do exhibit modern gadgets including expensive cell phones, and there are many Japanese cars on the road.

It was good to interact with my previous acquaintances like Mohsin Shakil, Khwaja Ahmad and others. I met Raja Nasim Akhtar, Ayesha Sohail, Nayab Sami, Dure-e-Nab, Ruxana Said, Mir Adnan Rehman, Zafeer Hussain Kiani, Hamidullah Pathan, Abdul Qadir Khan, Uzma Anjum, Raayna Batool Malick, Rabia Kiani, Mahwish Khan, Shahida Khalique, Humaira Hamid, Sara Akbar and others during the conference. **I found most of the people, especially women, quite affectionate and emotional. When I met Nayab Sami second time, she said, 'I'm very much worried about you.' I asked surprisingly, 'Why?' She said, 'I don't know. I hope you are comfortable over here.' Nayab Sami and her close friend Dur-e-Nab took special care of me during the conference dinner served at the table shared with the VIPs. They were very affectionate and so were others who wanted to have photographs with me after the dinner.**

Next morning at breakfast I met Rashid Rauf Banday, General Manager of Pearl Continental Hotel. He is a Kashmiri by birth but his family had moved from Amritsar to Pakistan at the time of partition. He was born and brought up in Pakistan and has done his hotel management from abroad. He said his family still maintains relations with people in Kashmir and he has visited Srinagar. The elders in his family do speak Kashmiri. I met two other Kashmiri speaking staff members working in the hotel. I interacted with the cultural attaché of the US Embassy. He said there are funds available under Track-II for organising people-to-people contact programmes between India and Pakistan.

We checked out from the hotel at 10 a.m. and went to the University to say bye to the organisers before leaving for Islamabad. An official of the University accompanied us. We were escorted by the security vehicle up to the border of AJK. On our way back we stopped at Murre to have lunch at a hotel. We reached Islamabad at about 4 p.m. Ruxana Said, who works at Taxila Institute of Asian Civilisation, Qaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad had asked us to meet her in Islamabad on our way back. We called her and she insisted that she and her husband would like to take us out for dinner. She said before dinner she can help us in shopping too.

After checking in the University Guest House and resting for a while, three of us left for Karachi Market in the town. Ruxana and her husband Riaz Khan met us in the market. Riaz has given up his job in army and has joined a company. He is active in politics and social work. He is a member and spokesperson of United Kashmir People's National Party and Chairman of Jammu & Kashmir Socio-Political Reconciliation & Reconstruction. Karachi market is just like Sarojini Nagar market in Delhi where middle class people shop. Shops are mostly owned and run by Afghanis and people from Karachi. We got a good bargain. Ruxana and Riaz took us to their home where we met their 6-year-old daughter Asha. She was a little shy in the beginning and told us she is learning Chinese in school. It was nice to know that Ruxana is an artist and paints. I liked one of her paintings and told her if she could give me a photograph of it, I would use it on the title page of *Vaakh* which I edit. She was very generous and said in that case she can present the original painting to me. And she did.

The Khans took us for dinner to Said Pur, a hub of restaurants, museums and galleries about 10 kilometers from Islamabad. **Riaz said that there is an old Hindu temple too nearby. It was around 9.30 p.m. by the time we reached there. The temple was locked at that time. We saw marble stones at the staircase with inscriptions in Urdu and Devanagari mentioning the names of the persons who have donated money to the temple. On one stone the amount of donation was mentioned–'Rs. 10'. That showed that the temple is really very old.**

We went to 'Des Pardes' restaurant laid out in Baluchi style in open with live music. We were escorted to the table surrounded by three cushioned cots with round pillows for sitting. Riaz is vegetarian. Two of us ordered vegetarian dishes, and the rest non-vegetarian. It took them more than 45 minutes to serve food, but it was delicious. A feedback form was brought along with a small bouquet of flowers. It was passed on to Asha for comments. Against the service column, Asha wrote 'bad'. All of us laughed.

Next morning, I saw a smart young man checking email in the lounge of the guest house. I waited for a while to take my turn. He knew that I'm from India and had returned from Muzaffarabad after attending the conference. He introduced himself and said that he had completed his MBBS from a medical college in Karachi and was planning to go abroad for higher studies in medicine. **He asked me, 'Why don't India and Pakistan solve the Kashmir problem once for all?' I responded, 'Do you have an idea how it can be solved?' He provided an immediate solution, 'It's simple. Let India keep the part it is administering, and Pakistan theirs. LoC can become an international border with special relaxation to be given to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to visit each other.' I kept on thinking about a simple solution to a complex problem coming from a young mind.**

We left for the airport at 9 a.m. to catch the flight to Lahore and the connecting flight to Delhi. The PIA flight coming from Kabul was delayed by an hour but we reached Lahore in time to catch the flight to Delhi at 2.30 p.m.

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Photo: Tara Dhar Hasnain

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IGNCA Festival on 'Revisiting Bhand Pather'

Reviving a Supine Tradition

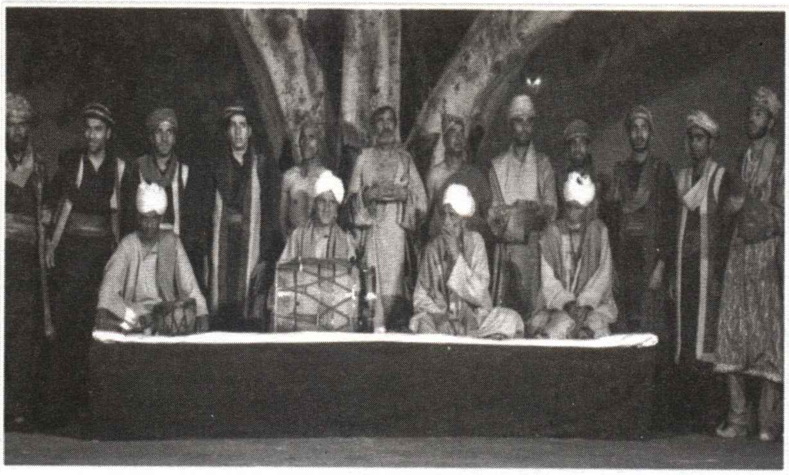
—Sushma Jatoo

A three-day festival on the folk theatre of Kashmir Bhand Pather was organized at the Amphitheatre of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi from 5th to 7th of April, 2013. The festival titled 'Revisiting Bhand Pather' was held under the ongoing Silver Jubilee celebrations of the establishment of the Centre and was organized in collaboration with M. K. Raina, eminent theatre and cinema personality, who directed these Pathers (performances), enacted by a Bhand troupe from Kashmir comprising 23 artistes.

The festival was inaugurated by Mr. V. B. Pyarelal (I.A.S.), Joint-Secretary, IGNCA on the evening of 5th of April, 2013 in the august presence of Prof. K. D. Tripathi from Varanasi, Prof. T. N. Ganjoo from Delhi, Prof. Farooq Fayyaz from Kashmir, and M. K. Raina at the Amphitheatre, IGNCA.

The Speakers at the Panel Discussion

The first Pather chosen for performance was 'Gosain Pather', which is an important ingredient of the repertoire of the Bhands and has been in the public sphere for many centuries being enacted by generations of Bhands. Soon after the lighting of the inaugural lamp, the stage of IGNCA Amphitheatre came to life by the magical sounds of Surnai, Dhol and Nagara and the colourfully dressed troupe of Bhands robed as Sadhus entering the arena. These exhausted and tired Sadhus are supposed to be returning from a long and gruelling pilgrimage to Amarnath. A local Kashmiri Brahmin along with his three sons receives these Sadhus and takes care of them and their Guru hoping to get some gifts in lieu of the services rendered, in cash or kind. Although dealing with a rather serious concept of realizing God's ultimate truth, the play operates at many levels of consciousness–from the physical to the abstract. A dialogue sequence takes place between a Rishi and a seeker on the lines of the teachings of Kashmiri Shaiva and Sufi philosophies, which concludes by the disappearance of the Rishi into void symbolizing the merger of the Jivatma (being) into Paramatma (the Supreme being). Now, the Brahmin ponders over the depth of this dialogue while his sons want him to leave this world like the Rishi, so that they can inherit his worldly possessions. This insistence on his death turns into absurd humour when the father keeps on pretending to die and then rising again. While dying and coming alive, he enacts the death of numerous corrupt and dishonest characters within the society. The sons, getting fed up of his act, threaten to kill him if he does not leave his body quickly. Finally, they take their father to be dead and take him for cremation, but under the shroud he reveals to the audience that he was still alive.

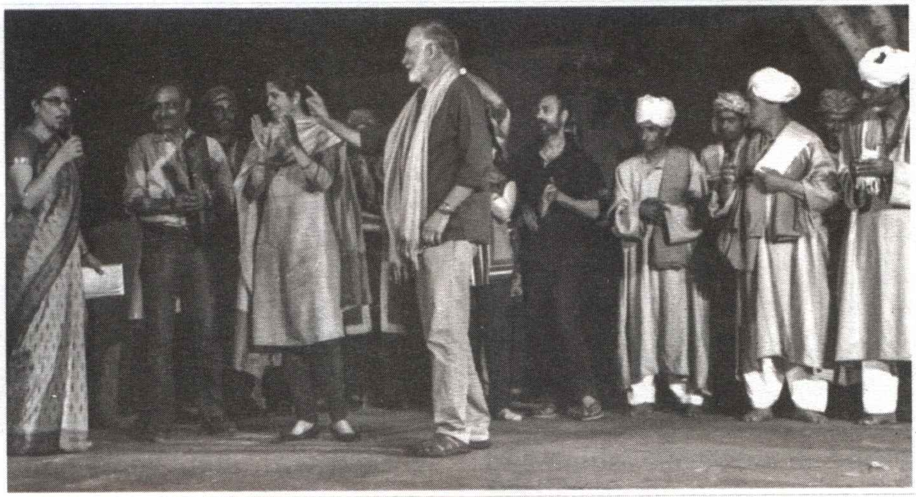


A scene from 'Badshah Pather'

In the evening of the second day, the historical background of this particular theatre art form of Kashmir was discussed in a seminar at the IGNCA by a panel of scholars comprising Prof. Farooq Fayyaz from Kashmir, Prof. K. D. Tripathi from Varanasi and Prof. T. N. Ganjoo from Delhi while M. K. Raina moderated the session. During the course of discussion, the evolution, journey and contemporary scenario of this rare and endangered art form of Kashmir were reflected upon by the scholars in great details. Dr. (Smt.) Kapila Vatsyayan, founder-member of the IGNCA, also joined the deliberations and addressed the gathering. The discussions highlighted the need for the revival of this art form for posterity.

After the successful conclusion of the panel discussion, the focus shifted to the Amphitheatre once again, as the Bhands wearing animal masks and colourful costumes of forest-dwellers overtook the stage to perform the 'Shikargah Pather'. This Pather is also a traditional Bhand Pather, which has been revived after 30 years. It deals with the kingdom of Pashupati, the Shiva, and his forest beings–trees, humans, animals and birds. The Pather showcases the conflict between the forest dwellers and the people who claim to be the masters of the forest. It shows the story of a man who looks after his cattle in the forest and lives in peaceful co-existence with the animals and birds of the forest. In this world of harmony between man and nature arrives a hunter along with his team in search of his lost prey of a pair of hanguls. On meeting the forest-dweller, the hunter asks him, 'Who are you?' The forest-dweller responds, 'Who are you?' This exchange builds itself up to an abstract sequence about the ownership of the forest and nature. The forest-dweller becomes a hostage in his own area. In this humorous argument, the forest-dweller shows them a lion, the real king of the forest, who might have taken away their pair of deers. The hunters in their anger and fear go for the hunting of the lion and finally kill it, despite the protests of the dweller. Happy at this killing, the hunters argue over the credit of killing of the lion. The upset forest-dweller asks the dead lion to reveal himself, and narrate the story of his death. The lion alongwith other animals sings songs of Nature and its preservation.

On the third and concluding evening, 'Badshah Pather' was performed at the amphitheatre. The Pather is a part of experimentation of M. K. Raina wherein he incorporates different narratives and motifs into the traditional Bhand repertoire. This particular Pather was an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'King Lear'. Through this Pather the story of two fathers namely, Badshah and Bedar and the relationship with their sons was put in perspective along with the duties and responsibilities they have towards each other. In the Pather, Badshah chose to divide his kingdom amongst his three sons. His elder sons Shamim and Karim express their love for him in highly exaggerated and hypocritical manner and were rewarded with a large part of the kingdom while the youngest son Rafiq gave Badshah a very honest reply stating that he loved him as 'a son would love his father'. Hearing Rafiq's reply, Badshah expels him out



Ms. Dipali Khanna, Member-Secretary, IGNCA honouring the artistes at the end of the festival

of his kingdom. As days pass by, Shamim and Karim decide not to put up with Badshah's instructions any more and force him to leave the kingdom. Bedar on the other hand makes a similar mistake and faces a similar fate when he misjudges his son Sikander and believes the lies of Kahram, his illegitimate son. When exposed to the forces of nature, Badshah realizes the meaning of Rafiq's reply and his love. He regrets his decision but is unable to change the course of events. Hearing his father's plight, Rafiq runs to comfort him and tries to bring his honour back, but instead gets killed by his own brothers. Finally, Badshah, aggrieved by the gruesome murder of his faithful son, also passes away. With this spectacular play, the festival concluded.

On all the three evenings, a large number of people turned up to watch the festival 'Revisiting the Bhand Pather' at the IGNCA, most of them being Kashmiris. They not only appreciated, but also got nostalgic after watching the performances. Some of them were happy to interact with the artistes and congratulated the IGNCA for organizing this event. Ms. Dipali Khanna, Member-Secretary, IGNCA also interacted with the artistes and the audience and expressed her happiness at the overwhelming response to the festival. She also felicitated M. K. Raina for conceiving and executing the programme and the artistes for their spectacular dramatic performances. Sushma Jatoo, coordinator of the event, thanked the audience and the IGNCA officials for their presence, support and whole-hearted involvement.

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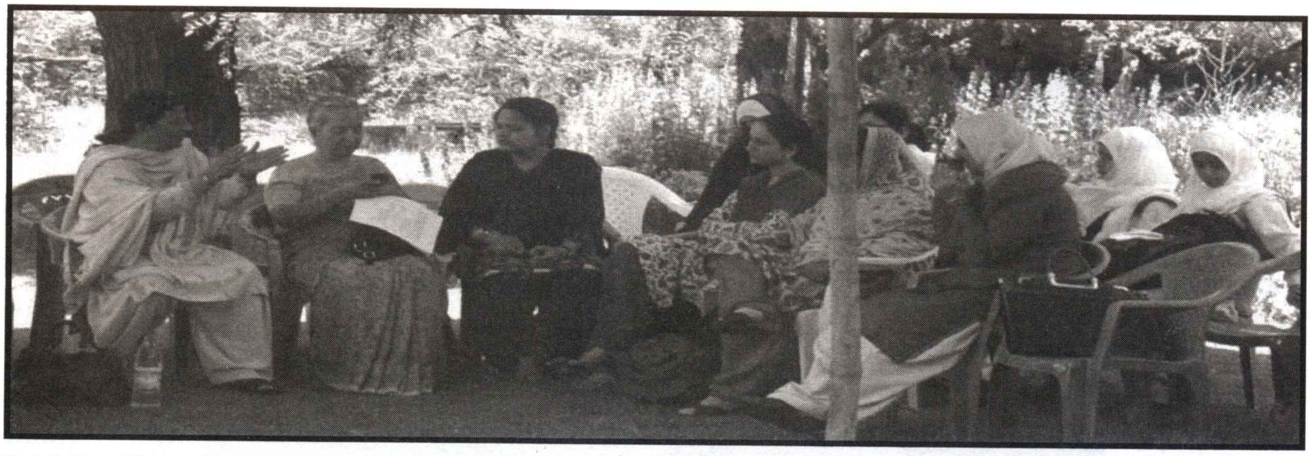
Dara Shikoh Festival 2013

Syncretism Brought Alive

—Ramanjit K. Johal

The 5th Dara Shikoh Festival continued and consolidated the tradition of earlier years by offering a bouquet of academic, art and cultural activities and events with special reference to Kashmir. Workshops were organized on pottery, creative writing, photography, education and leadership, and environmental education. A ceramic artist from Delhi collaborated with a *papier machie* artist from the Valley, as did potters from Auroville Tamil Nadu with those from Kraal Sangri and Pulwama, traditional potters' villages close to Srinagar. A display of pottery and photographs from these workshops was also held along with the two-day symposium that followed.

The theme for the symposium organized on 25th and 26th May was *Environment and Education*. The festival hosted a number of performances; these included Pranab Mukherjee's solo performance 'An Unfinished Letter to Agha Shahid Ali', a Kashmiri folk style play 'Shikargah', two documentary films–'Man



Fakiri' a film on the Sufi music of Kashmir and 'Sama' on Muslim mystic music of India, and finally a sacred music recital by Madan Gopal Singh and *Chaar Yaar*.

Almond Villa, the venue for the festival, was a hive of activity for many days. The picturesque villa, with its sprawling grounds, allowed each activity its own island of space while remaining in sync with the Festival at large. Most of the facilitators and presenters stayed there and this provided ample opportunity for conversations at mealtimes, over cups of delicious after-dinner kahva, long walks and other excursions. The format of the festival was such that it allowed activities to complement each other and made adequate time for exchange of ideas, exploration of perspectives, food for thought and delicious food too! DSC also organized a visit to Dachigam National Park escorted by Tahir of Wildlife SOS and an INTACH heritage walk in the city for the guests conducted by Sameer Hamdani.

It is significant that the regular visitors to the festival were full of praise for what the festival has achieved and remarked on its increasing scope and outreach. Presenters, facilitators, participants and supporters made constructive suggestions for future themes and concerns that could be addressed.

The following is a detailed report on the events as they unfolded:

Workshops

Pottery Workshop (8-18 May)

Angad Vohra and his assistant, Gopal, from Mantra Potteries, Auroville, Tamil Nadu, worked with eight local potters from Kraal Sangri and Pulwama. They produced a range of functional and decorative pottery with local clay-bowls, mugs, trays, vases, incense holders, infusers and some decorative pieces which were glazed and re-fired at the DSC pottery centre. Though opposed to local practice, the advantage of finishing the base of the pottery, adding handles to tumblers, etc., was demonstrated in the interest of wider marketability.

Dara Shikoh Centre volunteers had earlier visited the local potters to inform them about the workshop and its objectives. The participating potters were paid an attractive daily stipend. The traditional local potters who came were mostly experienced and skilled; however, it was seen that the younger among them showed greater initiative and were more open to experimenting with different products, techniques and designs. In response to this workshop, the Dara Shikoh Centre is planning to set up a glazing centre.

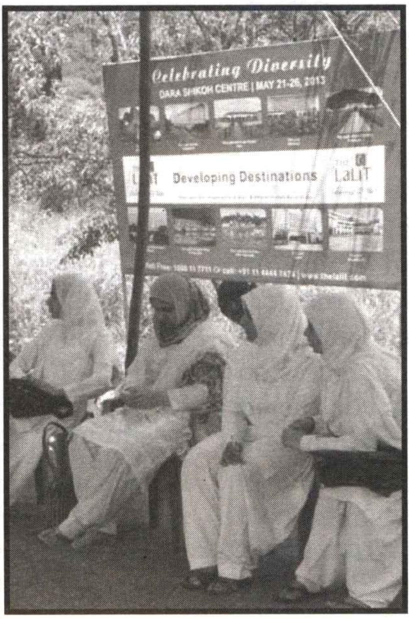
Ceramic and Papier Maché Collaboration (18-25 May)

Vineet Kacker, ceramic artist, collaborated with Shabeer Ahmed, a local *papier maché* artist. They produced items that were decorated (coloured slips applied, *scrafitto* carving done) in the local style with local motifs on a very contemporary form. These were then glazed and re-fired.

The local *papier machie* craftsman truly appreciated the respect he received as an 'artist'; this was reciprocated by Mr. Kacker who termed this collaboration a 'jugalbandi'. Vineet Kacker made two significant suggestions while sharing his collaboration experience. First, that the Dara Shikoh Centre could have potters in residence for 4-8 weeks to produce a body of work; and second, pottery workshops could be held on a regular basis inviting pottery artists from across the country to work with the local ones. This is bound to foster innovation, creativity and collaboration.

Education and Leadership Workshop (22-23 May)

This workshop was an 'Ethical & Transformative Education Initiative' in collaboration with the Global Education & Leadership Foundation. DSC took great care to be inclusive in its identification of participating schools; diversity was an important criterion as was the fact that these teachers had not earlier had such an opportunity. The participating institutions were Zirin School, Khalsa School, Tibetan School, Jalali School, KER School, Vasanta School, Kashyapa School, St. Paul's School, Miskeen Bagh School, DPS Srinagar and Montessori School. This well-attended two-day workshop's participants included school teachers and some principals, 48 on day one and 42 on day two. Mrs. Gowri Ishwaran was ably assisted by her team of four from Global Education and Leadership Foundation–Reha, Dimple, Lovelesh and Ashima.



The workshop had two main objectives: first, to energize through engagement and to take this approach back to the classroom; second, to recognize the significance of being a teacher and the journey of transitioning from a teacher to a facilitator. The strategies used included storytelling, role-play and dialogue.

The workshop began with posing the question about being a teacher by chance or by choice, and the participants were asked to take it home with them to reflect upon. Role-play was used to facilitate identification of the challenges teachers are facing. The interactive session that followed sought to gain a holistic view and begin the dialogue towards resolution.

Day two took up the question posed at the outset i.e., being a teacher by choice or by chance. This internal journey was traversed with the facilitators engaging the participants in a dialogue on what they thought being a teacher meant. A dialogue facilitating an in-depth discussion on the challenges they had identified on day one was resumed. Questions on being a teacher in the present-day context were also raised and discussed.

The workshop was well received by the participants. They got into the spirit of the exercises from the word go. For many the techniques shared provided an affirmation for the pedagogy they were already practising, others believed this experience had given them an opportunity to introspect and refocus.

The high degree of involvement and commitment of the participants was quite commendable; it is noteworthy that the participating teachers were enthused enough to make the time and effort to come and attend the two-day education and environment symposium over the ensuing weekend.

Environment Education Workshop (22-23 May)

The Environment Education workshop at the Fifth Dara Shikoh Festival was conducted by Dr. Kranti Yaardi and Pallavi Ganju from Bharati Vidyapeeth, Institute of Environment Education & Research, Pune. Its basic premise was that initiatives taken by people to better their own environment can only succeed through a locale-specific environment sensitization based on the three pillars of sustainability–economic, social and environmental. The solution to the stand-off between development and environment lies in the attitude of the local people towards their natural environment, and their perceptions about the pattern of development to be followed. Thus people need to be motivated to act for environmental preservation and the most effective medium of bringing about change in attitudes is through students who have received an appropriate education.

The Environment Education workshop at the Fifth Dara Shikoh Festival concentrated on sensitizing 25-30 young college students about the natural beauty they have inherited and the environmentally degrading impacts that could be critical if ignored and left unattended. The process of awareness building follows a path of Appreciation - Understanding - Concern - Action.

The workshop used activities and interactive sessions to demonstrate the gaps in dissemination of knowledge from source to recipient, how these gaps create disparities in environment education and action, understanding the inequalities of natural resource utilization and management, and how it leads to unsustainable development. A session on the Biodiversity of Kashmir was conducted as was an interactive session on the environment related activities that students are already conducting at their college level. The students were also shown 'Saving the Tiger', a film about environment education programs initiated by two schools around two of the major tiger reserves of India.

The activity-oriented sessions on the second day saw students learn to look at applying simple techniques which can considerably reduce the growing menace of solid waste in Srinagar city. Role play was used to understand the responses of various stakeholders involved in any development activity; a case study of a builder's plan to make a golf course in an area occupied by saffron fields made the participants weigh economic, social and environmental pros and cons and debate the feasibility of the golf course.

College faculty and volunteers from the local Wildlife SOS helped organize the participants and aided the facilitators in conducting this workshop.

Creative Writing Workshop (22-23 May)

Neerja Mattoo along with Naseem Shifai and Nusrat Andrabi led this workshop which saw active participation by students and faculty from the local colleges and even a few high schools. The 28 participants expressed themselves via varied genres in multiple languages–short stories, narratives and all kinds of poetry in Kashmiri, English, Urdu and Punjabi.

Each contribution was appreciated, critiqued, pondered over and discussed thoroughly by the group. The facilitators enabled a very open and constructive dialogue which they led from

upfront sharing their valuable insights, skill and experience. Considerable time was spent on language, expression, nuances and appropriateness of words as well as the limits of poetic license. Naseem Shafai emphasized the need for humility in the young writer attempting to experiment. She stressed the need to first master the form, build a vocabulary and practice; creativity, while inspirational, requires rigour for it to be honed. It was interesting to see the camaraderie and mutual respect amongst the writers despite considerable disparity and variation in age and experience.

It was really encouraging for the participants to hear from Neerja Mattoo that it was the intention of DSC to collect these writings for publication–that would indeed be a befitting and tangible outcome of the creative writing workshop.

Photography Workshop (22-24 May)

Ajaz Rashid worked with a dozen local participants discussing the technical aspects of the camera and photography with a view to use this fresh expertise to capture images of built heritage and environment as a living space. He discussed the significance of choosing the subject matter, a suitable camera, the importance of good lenses versus high megapixels, photography as a profession, making a picture library, documentary photography, editing, selection of images, etc. The eye and perspective of the photographer in telling a story was emphasized.

There was a trip with INTACH. The participants captured various activities underway at the Dara Shikoh Festival, the plants and wildlife in and around Almond Villa, and images from the city. Selected images were displayed on the 25th and 26th with evocative captions of quotes from authors, poets and philosophers, for example, *If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?*–Rumi; *People everywhere love windows*–Bill Gates; *Where thou art, that is home*–Emily Dickinson; *Lord, cried out the idols, don't let us be broken/Only we can convert the infidel tonight*–'Tonight' from *Call me Ishmael*–a group of ghazals by Aga Shahid Ali; *I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free*–Nikos Kazantzakis; *Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment*–Rumi.

Symposium on Environment and Education (25-26 May)

25th May (Morning Session)
Natural Resources: Sustainable Development

Prof. Mustafa Shah from the Department of Zoology, Kashmir University, chaired this well attended session. He emphasized the topicality of the theme.

In his presentation on Environment and Governance, K.K. Singh, an environment activist from Madhya Pradesh, discussed the disconnect between research on environment and awareness among policy makers. He dwelt at length on the politics of development vs. conservation and the prioritizing of the former in government policy. Amongst other indicators this is reflected in the low percentage of change in land use over the past decade. Whatever change does take place is for public purpose (government/government sponsored activity) and only a fraction in favor of individuals. He cited the unique People's Forestry legislation – The Madhya Pradesh Lok Vaniki Adhiniyam 2001 – making a case for forest management of private forests by the people themselves.

Dr. Erach Barucha, Director, Institute of Environment Education and Research, Bharati Vidyapeeth, Pune, an eminent environment educationist, discussed the positive linkage between biodiversity and cultural diversity. Traditional knowledge, biodiversity and land use corresponds to the existence of traditional tribal cultures; however, there is a strong disconnect between what is taught by the modern system of education and the traditional knowledge acquired from family and community. In light of the increasing transitioning from co-existence to conflict, he suggested devising site-specific solutions. He also discussed the need to preserve intellectual property rights for traditional arts and practices.

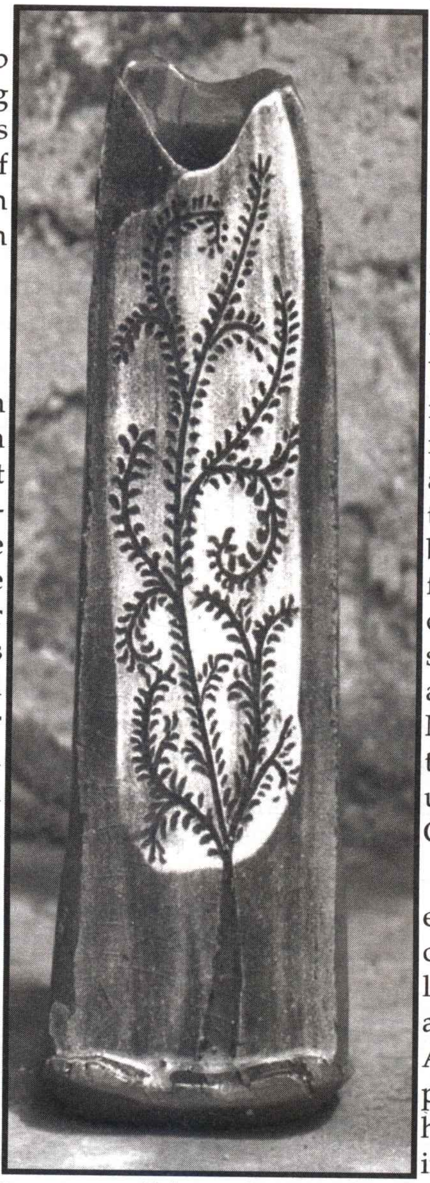
There was a presentation on Kashmir's environment and issues of conservation by Gurcharan Singh from the Forest Department, a presentation by Wildlife S.O.S. Kashmir on education and awareness for black bear-human conflict mitigation and among other comments and remarks a city-specific intervention by a local activist on traffic issues in the valley and the need to explore the options of water transport and to encourage walking. The subsequent discussion focused on the need for support from civil society in understanding and addressing environment issues.

Deepak Castelino wound up the session with a beautiful song about conserving water; it was about remembering to turn off the water tap and had been composed in a workshop with school children in Delhi.

25th May (Afternoon Session) Environment: Built Heritage

The post-lunch session commenced with Amitabh Mattoo, Director and Robert Johanson, Chairman, Australia-India Institute, Melbourne (Festival Partners) addressing the audience. They expressed their pleasure at partnering this worthy endeavour and lauded Jyotsna Singh, Director, DSC for her commendable initiative and resolve in making this annual festival a significant cultural and education event in Srinagar. Amitabh Mattoo exhorted the eminent citizens of the city and the State to come forward and support such initiatives.

The session on Built Heritage was most ably conducted by Ayaz Rasool Nazki, Director, ICCR, Kashmir. He reiterated the importance of built environment as a tangible cultural asset and the ensuing presentations and discussions were extremely significant in this context.



'Mapping the City' by Saleem Beg of INTACH Kashmir was a visual presentation on the vernacular architecture of Kashmir and some projects undertaken by the Jammu & Kashmir Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage. INTACH has been entrusted with the preparation of a blueprint for the Dastgeer Sahib shrine which was gutted in a devastating fire last year. Some landmark religious structures have also been taken over by INTACH for restoration, for instance Aali Masjid at Eidgah in downtown Srinagar and the Thag Baba Sahib Shrine in the Shah Kadal area of Srinagar city. Mr. Beg claimed that INTACH has been able to change the mindset of people who originally believed that reconstruction of dilapidated heritage structures was the only way forward. He said they have been able to inspire people to restore dilapidated structures instead of dismantling them. He also talked about how, envisaging their protection, INTACH has been motivating lawmakers to frame legislation for the conservation of heritage structures in the state. They have also been successful in putting the Mughal Gardens in Kashmir on the tentative World Heritage list under the category of Global Cultural Assets.

Abha Narain Lambah, an eminent Mumbai-based conservation architect, shared her long experience in conservation architecture. She discussed the Alchi Monastery's restoration project in Ladakh that could not have been possible without the involvement of the community; they volunteered their labour. Citing her experience with various projects in Mumbai where the local bodies and their officials were apathetic, but the involvement of the local people and their contributions ensured success, e.g. taking charge of restoration expenses for areas outside their commercial premises, organizing the signage as proposed by the restorers, etc. Thus despite hurdles there are many heartening experiences where people along with architects and experts have organized themselves to help in conservation of their living heritage. Abha Lambah believes that public-private partnerships are the key to successful projects; she cited the example of a comprehensive conservation project that restored the façade and conserved the historic Victorian neo-Gothic structure of Eliphinstone College in the Kala Ghoda Art District through a unique public-private partnership; in this case her firm's partner client was the Kala Ghoda Association. Citizens can take the initiative and conserve their built heritage, especially living heritage, in places like Mumbai, without depending on the government, she averred.

Rafiq Khan, Town Planner and Conservation Architect, Los Angeles, shared his experience of revisiting his homeland frequently and seeing the disconnect between urban planning and the people. There was obviously no dearth of funds for development projects but these were conceived and executed as an imposition. He believed that people's participation was provided for constitutionally but it needed to be secured by the people themselves. Proactive and alert citizens and non-government organizations have to keep abreast of new plans proposed and, as per law, give their inputs/opinions, mobilize public opinion and not allow any plan to be a fait accompli.

25th May
Reports by Workshop Facilitators

The cultural evening commenced with presentations of reports on the workshops of the previous days by their workshop facilitators– Angad Vohra, Vineet Kackar, Neerja Mattoo, Ajaz Rashid and Yaardi. Local organisors from Wildlife SOS and Mehwash, a volunteer assisting the Education Leadership Workshop too presented their feedback. This was an appropriate opportunity to share with the citizenry, participants and patrons of the festival the activities that the Dara Shikoh Centre had been bustling with in the preceding days.

26th May (Morning Session)
Society and Education

The symposium saw a fairly good attendance despite gathering clouds and it being a Sunday. The Convener of the session, Neerja Mattoo, brought her wealth of experience and erudition to her introduction of the topic and summation of each presentation – her observations while conducting the Q & A too were really topical and relevant.

The session began with a presentation of *socio-cultural perspectives* in the context of a social environment wherein the pace of change has greatly accelerated. Jaskiran K. Mathur, a sociologist from Brooklyn, New York stressed upon a holistic understanding of culture and the need to assess why we resist change and what is it that we seek to conserve. In the light of the fact that change is inevitable and even necessary, concepts like 'development', 'values', 'modernization' etc. were examined and questions about presumptions, biases and vested interests raised. The role of education was emphasized in raising awareness, acquiring discernment, rising above the pitfalls of short-term solutions and comprehending the larger picture in order to navigate the challenges of the 21st century.

The next speaker, Rekha Chaudhary, a political scientist from Jammu University opined that 'peace' and 'inclusive humanism' could be greatly facilitated through education; thus the rationale, appropriateness and function of educational institutions demands considerable thought and deliberation. **Focusing her attention on the state of Jammu & Kashmir, she recounted the history of this geopolitical entity and cautioned how 'diversity', an enriching factor in and of itself, could easily be interpreted as and even justify 'divergence' acquiring alarmingly dysfunctional overtones in situations rife with 'conflict'. She suggested reevaluating mindsets in order to see what it**

is about diversity that works and how it can be retained without becoming a cue for divergence and discontent. Divergence is also an outcome of the watertight regional histories and geographies taught, without a view to a holistic treatment of the State. This is starkly reflected in the press and in politics.

Ajaz Rashid, who had earlier in the festival facilitated the photography workshop, was unable to attend due to a personal bereavement. He sent a copy of his presentation to be shared. He emphasized the significance of *reading for children* and why reclaiming it was an imperative. He drew upon his personal experience of setting up Eureka Kashmir, a book store with a small Reading Room and limited membership, housing a small collection of books for children and young adults that he started with books donated by his daughter. He established the need for advanced levels of literacy in the future for adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century, who would need such literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. He also discussed strategies for fostering a love of reading, one of the most effective being the creation of a library facility. He also stressed reading aloud time at home and at school to create a positive reading experience to engage children. It is important for the family members to do or not do things that they want children to emulate.

Mohd. Sharif Bhat, State Manager, 'Save the Children', shared his very valuable experience on 'Education for the Most Marginalized Children'. Recognizing the mammoth task ahead, 'Save the Children' has set a realistic goal of reaching 5 percent from this category. The theme and focus of 'Save the Children' is Quality, Inclusive Education, Child Protection, Child Survival, Humanitarian Response and Conflict Disaster Risk Protection. He discussed problems specific to the various regions of the state and emphasized the need to broaden the category of the term 'marginalized' to include students who become so due to the specific situation in Jammu & Kashmir. Besides the girl child, minorities and children with disabilities, it is imperative that orphans, unwitting breadwinners, those injured during unrest and conflict and therefore rendered unable to attend school should also be recognized amongst the 'most marginalized'. He insisted that universal access to education is the only solution for reducing gaps and disparities. During the discussion that followed, Director, State Institute of Education, suggested that 'Save the Children' should share its best practices with school teachers across the State.

26th May (Afternoon Session)
Inclusive Education

Ahsan-ul-Haq was the Convenor of this session. He introduced the speakers–Becky Norman, Tadzen Jolden, Farida Khan, Muzafer and Akriti Goenka Hussain, who were looking at psycho-social perspectives of Inclusive Education and the role of government and non-government institutions in promoting and facilitating it.

Rebecca Norman of SECMOL (Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh) spoke on 'Holistic Education for Adolescents at SECMOL'. SECMOL was founded in 1988 by returning Ladakhi students to reform the education system. The economy of Ladakh is constrained by its location (a desert at 11000 ft. above sea level). Subsistence farming, earlier the only occupation, is now supplemented by some opportunities in the army, Government jobs and tourism. SECMOL works closely with the Government for school reforms by providing residential programmes for students who have failed/dropped out of Class X, or even those who have passed but feel the need for real learning. SECMOL's concept of holistic education includes basic academics, social and environmental values, confidence and leadership, entrepreneurship and careers, practical skills and Ladakhi culture and history. For example, science is taught in order to comprehend its application to health, solar energy, environment, food and farming. There is much emphasis on practical skills, confidence-building and linguistic abilities like English conversation.

Farida Khan, Professor and Dean at the Department of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia University has been closely associated with policy making on education in Kashmir and was thus a valuable resource person for a perspective on inclusive education in Kashmir. She drew on her experiences from visits to schools in remote areas and believed that while there remains a lot to be done, much was being done. She hoped the phase lag evident in concerns like absence of legislation on Right to Education in Kashmir would be addressed as Kashmir was in the process of formulating its education policy. It could, at this juncture, draw upon best practices from the rest of the country, a notable example being the work of Eklavya in Madhya Pradesh. She concurred with speakers from earlier sessions who had stressed the role of education leading to awareness for any positive and sustainable socio-economic change and development.

Tadzen Jolden was scheduled to speak on inclusive education in Ladakh. However, she chose to give a general socio-economic update on Ladakh familiarizing the audience with the state of the social environment and the potential changes, adaptations and preparations that were imminent.

Mohd. Muzafer Khan, a clinical psychologist, talked about inclusive education in the context of the differently abled. He stressed the importance of class learning and the need for it to be a win-win situation for both the able and disabled, where the disabled have to be mainstreamed with requisite support and services and the education of those without disabilities is not compromised. He suggested various ways of creating disability awareness among children, e.g. having students watch their favorite TV show with the volume off to understand deafness, have them use a wheel-chair/crutches for a day, have them communicate using only body language, switch letters around in reading exercises to understand how things appear to a dyslexic child and so on. He shared his deep concern about the low priority accorded to mental health and sensitive rehabilitation measures for substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder in developing countries in general and disturbed regions in particular. These lacunae are exacerbated due to lack of awareness, shortage of trained personnel and the apprehension of stigma.

Akriti Hussain and her team discussed the concept of multiple intelligences and the need to identify the abilities of a child and address his learning method etc. on this basis. They believe that the need of the hour is to tackle the education system's lack of accommodation and inclusion. Teachers and administrators are not trained in inclusive teaching; uniqueness must be respected and not tagged. She introduced the audience to some recent techniques to assess individuality and identify personality types. While her presentation held the interest of the audience, the possible outcomes of adopting an approach slotting children at an early age was received with some misgivings.

The two-day symposium saw some pertinent points being raised and discussed with considerable concern and enthusiasm. It came to a close with Jyotsna Singh, Director, DSC proposing a vote of thanks to all participants, attendees and those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes, especially the volunteers, supporters, friends, family and the staff at Almond Villa.

Performances

22nd May: 'An Unfinished Letter to Agha Shahid Ali' performed by Pranab Mukherji

Pranab Mukherji, an artiste from Badal Sircar's group, presented a riveting solo performance during the lunch hour. Participants from all the workshops were present and he received a standing ovation for his very moving and soul-stirring monologue that drew upon disturbing contemporary events across the country. Picking lines from a number of radical authors and poets in multiple languages, he drove home a scathing indictment of the current state of the world, its vagaries and vicissitudes.

25th May: *'Man Fakiri'–a documentary film by M. K. Raina*

This documentary, set in Kashmir, portrays the integral role Sufi music has played in the Kashmiri cultural ethos. That it continues to be quite central to the Kashmiri way of life, especially during traditional observances and events, is a heartening indicator of its survival despite the influx of other forms of music and changing tastes. M. K. Raina follows its history, the practitioners, their instruments and the efforts to pass on the torch to the next generation. Especially interesting is the section on young women who are learning and practicing it as are the reflections by established male and female performers about their music, its audience, as well as its relationship with classical Hindustani music and *Bhand Pather,* the local folk theatre. Shot amidst the stunning natural beauty of the region, the film leaves the viewer with indelible visuals and the strains of the renditions reverberating.

25th May: *'Shikargah'–traditional Kashmiri theatre*

This play in Kashmiri folk style by the *Bhands* of Akin Gaon was directed by M. K. Raina with inputs from actors and musicians. The theme of this presentation resonated with the mood of the festival as the focus was on environment and our relationship with other creatures that inhabit it. The flexible and innovative format of *Bhand Pather* is conducive to tailoring the length and content of the performance for more effective communication with the audience. Through humour, satire and musical interludes, the actors and musicians sought to raise awareness and recognition of our limitations and responsibilities. The performance was charming and enjoyable even for those who did not understand Kashmiri. The masked characters portraying animals, their antics, and the interactive parts of the play had the children completely spellbound.

26th May: *'Sama: Muslim mystic music of India'- documentary film by Shazia Khan*

This young director inspired by the mystic music traditions of her native Kashmir journeys through Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Assam, Gujarat and Rajasthan, in the wake of the multi-hued Muslim mystic music. The mood created by 'Sama' reverberates in inter-religious expressions and is in harmony with the prayer traditions of multiple faiths. The local flavor of language, preceding belief systems as well as the unique path Islam has traversed to each region accounts for the rich variations in musical idiom despite the uniting thread of Muslim mysticism. It is evident that the director is an exceptional cinematographer and this adeptness greatly embellishes the rich and interesting narrative of mystic music across much of the sub-continent. While no means exhaustive, the director's effort is remarkable for her reach, what she seeks, and its visual appeal.

26th May: *Sacred Music Recital by Madan Gopal Singh and Chaar Yaar*

One of India's most highly regarded exponents of modern Sufi music, Madan Gopal Singh enthralled the audience at the finale of the 5th Dara Shikoh Festival. It was a sublime evening of Sufi poetry rendered by Madan Gopal and *Chaar Yaar,* his musical ensemble comprising Deepak Castelino on guitar, Pritam Ghosal on the sarod and Gurmeet as the percussionist. His rich repertoire of verse in Persian, Urdu, Punjabi, *Khadi Boli,* English and a smattering of other languages was further enhanced by his extraordinary ability to collate and present a melodious collage of folk wisdom, spiritual striving, and the search for oneness and harmony with fellow beings, the Creator and his creation. It is befitting that the syncretism of Dara Shikoh was reiterated in Madan Gopal's worldview and echoed in the dulcet notes of the festival's final rendition.

◆

Portrait of a Lady

— Nyla Ali Khan

Akbar Jehan's father's family, the Nedous, had emigrated from Dubrovnik, Croatian city on the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic Sea, to Lahore in the 1800s. Croatia is currently an independent country. From 1815 to 1918, it was part of the Austrian Empire, and from 1918 to 1991, it was part of Yugoslavia. Serendipitously, I found the naturalization certificate of Michael Adam Nedou, Akbar Jehan's paternal grandfather, in the depleted family archive. According to the certificate signed by C. U. Aitchinson, Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab and its Dependencies, on February 28, 1887, he conferred upon hotelier Michael Adam Nedou the rights and privileges of naturalization. In the 'Memorial' presented to C. U. Aitchinson, Michael Adam Nedou explained that he was born in Ragusa, Austria (Ragusa is the Italian and Latin name for Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian Coast); he was of Slovak nationality, and had been in British India for the past twenty-five years. At the time of the presentation of the 'Memorial', Michael Adam Nedou was fifty years old, settled in Lahore, and sought to be granted the rights and privileges of a British subject of Queen Victoria, 'of Great Britain and Ireland, and Empress of India, within her Majesty's said Indian Territories,' in compliance with Act XXX of 1852 ('Certificate of Naturalization').

He had sailed to India from Ragusa in 1862 where, after a period of adversity and hard knocks in which his will and perseverance had been tested, he had accomplished much. He had crossed the roiling waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean and borne the stormy turbulence of an immigrant's precarious existence to land on the shores of Bombay, now Mumbai, India. The lithe, imaginative and vivacious young woman who later became his wife, Jessie Maria, made his acquaintance while visiting her brother George, who was a Sea Captain in the British Royal Navy. That acquaintance, rather enchantingly, metamorphosed into love, and the wedding was solemnized soon after their first meeting. Their older son, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou, Akbar Jehan's father, according to his birth and baptism certificate, was born in Pune, British India, in 1877. Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou was one of nine children. He was born to Jessie and Michael Adam Nedou after six daughters, an event that was celebrated with much gusto. The birth of the second son, William Arthur Nedou, in 1879, was soon followed by that of the third son and youngest child, Walter Douglas Nedou (e-mail from Cynthia Schmidt to author, 20 January 2013).

According to family sources, Akbar Jehan's paternal grandfather, Michael Adam Nedou started out as a photographer and architect, but destiny had willed otherwise, and the decisions that he took shaped that destiny as though with the finesse of a calligrapher's brush. His first venture in hoteliering was the acquisition of the Sind Punjab Hotel in the port city of Karachi. He built the imposing and courtly Nedous' Hotel in Lahore, characterized by charm and grace, in the 1870s. He and the rest of his family later built the Nedous' Hotel in Gulmarg, Kashmir, in 1888. The hotel in Gulmarg is built on an elevation, overlooking the once luxuriantly lush meadow, with its cornucopia of fragrant, beauteous, and flourishing flowers. The riot of colors in Gulmarg in the summer has always had the power to revive my spirits! The cozy cottages around the main lounge, furnished with chintz drapes, chintz covered armchairs, soothing pastel counterpanes on the canopy beds, and hewn logs around the fire places would warm the cockles of any anglophile's heart. Despite the concretization in Gulmarg, the Nedous' Hotel has always retained an old world charm, maintaining, against all odds, its heritage character. Akbar Jehan's sister-in-law, Salima Nedou, observes in her unpublished manuscript that 'Michael Nedou was the pioneer of the hotel industry in India and he laid the first stone in the splendid structure of the country's hotels. His name is woven forever in the tapestry of our tourism.' The then grandiose Nedous hotel in Srinagar, which was opened in 1900, boasted a confectionary that, for a long time, had no parallel. The thought of the delectable jams and jellies that we got from the Nedous' bakery in my childhood makes me drool. Until the decade of the eighties, the Nedous hotel in Srinagar epitomized a rare and appealing excellence, and a flawless execution which, over the years, deteriorated. It is now, sadly, in a dilapidated state.

Begum Akbar Jehan Abdullah
(1917-2000)

In Akbar Jehan's father's lifetime, the Nedous' hotels in Lahore, Gulmarg, and Srinagar retained their reputations as classy, plush, and magnificent havens in colonial India. Akbar Jehan's father, the stoic-looking, stocky, and thick-set, though not short, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou took over the management of the restful hotel in Gulmarg, exquisitely and intimately described by M. M. Kaye in her whodunit novel, *Death in Kashmir*, from his father. Several people have testified to his proverbial philanthropy, beneficence, and kindness. Mother tells me that his advocacy of the nationalist movement in Kashmir, the stirrings of which began in the 1930s, encouraged Akbar Jehan to relinquish a life of affluence and repose to marry the rebel from Soura, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou 'spent his time helping the poor, built houses for them, and saved people wrongly convicted from jail and twice from the gallows.' Although a charming hotelier, his altruism and charitableness had given him a larger purpose in life, which earned him the admiration and appreciativeness of not just the 'highest names in the land [Lahore], but also those whose sufferings he had soothed and who remembered his kindness and charity.'

Akbar Jehan's mother, Mir Jan, respectfully called Rani jee by family, friends, and acquaintances, was an indomitable Gujjar woman, who has an imperturbable expression in all the pictures I have seen of her. Rani jee's family traced its lineage to the martial, patrilineal, and rigidly traditional Rajputs of Rajasthan. The impression that I get from her pictures is that she must have been a phlegmatic woman, secure in the knowledge that she was propertied and wealthy, not requiring anyone's good offices to lead a comfortable life. Her sturdy, reticent, and stout-hearted siblings, Niyaz Bi, Subi Bi, Sardar Bi, Lali Ma, and Ferozdeen were just as formidable looking as Rani jee. All of them were the proud owners of sprawling acres of magnificent land in Gulmarg, a resort which found a prominent place on the international map in that late 1800s and early 1900s through the endeavors of Michael Adam and Jessie Maria Nedou.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah writes of Rani jee in his autobiography that she was a virtuous, religious, and 'good natured lady'. He credits her with having infused the value of religious teachings and traditions in Akbar Jehan (*Fire of the Chinar*, 138). From all accounts, Rani jee was a termagant who knew how to keep the wheels of her household running smoothly without ruffling feathers. Although her husband's sisters looked down upon her, she had clearly made a success of her inter-racial and inter-cultural marriage, a union which can be difficult to navigate even in today's global and cosmopolitan age. Her material prosperity was greatly enhanced by her status as the mother of four strapping sons, Omar Nedou, George Nedou aka Mohammad Akram, Colonel Harry Nedou aka Ghulam Qadir, and Captain Benji Nedou aka Shamsuddin. Her only daughter, Akbar Jehan, was not a particularly tall woman, but she had a regal demeanor, resembling a statue in dignity, grace, and proportion.

Akbar Jehan's spiritual mentor was a well-educated divine, Mohi-ud-Din, who had given precedence to a life of asceticism over a worldly one. A very erudite person, Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din had Master's in Arabic, English and Philosophy from Punjab University, Lahore. While he was a student in Lahore, he was drawn to the tenets of the Naqshbandi Sufi order and, in following the precepts of that order, swore allegiance to Maulana Shah Saheb of Lahore. Originally from Amritsar, Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din had chosen to pursue a life of austerity in Nihalpur village, Pattan, which is in North Kashmir. Pattan abounds in orchards and, till date, boasts of several monuments of historical significance.

Legend has it that despondency having afflicted Akbar Jehan's parents, Rani jee and Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain because for several years after their getting married and their house remaining bereft of the patter of tiny feet and the heavenly mirth of children, they looked for scientific as well as spiritual remedies. After having been told about the religious convictions and spiritual prowess of Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din, they undertook a journey to Pattan in quest of peace and happiness. In their despondency, Rani jee's and Sheikh Ahmed Hussain's meeting with the Maulvi was nothing short of a miracle. Looking upon them with benevolence, the Maulvi beseeched them not to despair and to invoke God's mercy through prayers and gratitude, because they would be blessed with bonny boys and a cherubic girl who would embody high ideals and piety. He told them to name the girl 'Akbar Jehan'. That girl, Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din prophesied, would be his spiritual child (conversation with Parvez Ahmed Khan, nephew of Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din, dated 3 March 2013).

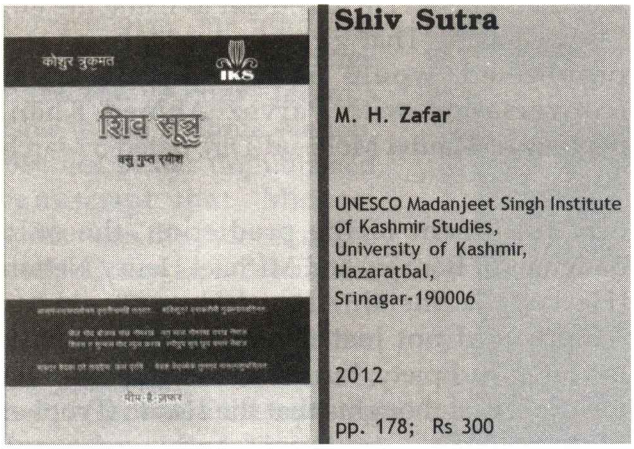
In fulfilment of the prediction, the only daughter of Rani jee and Michael Henry Nedou [Harry] aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain, Akbar Jehan could not just recite the Quran with devotion and piety, but could also expound on the exegetical thoughts that the *Hadith* (Prophet Mohammad's sayings and religious practices),*Sharia* (moral code and religious laws of Islam), and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) generated. **Mother tells me that Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din, whom Akbar Jehan greatly revered, influenced her decision to marry the Sheikh which, metaphorically, entailed swimming against the tide. I remember that whenever she encountered an ostensibly unyielding encumbrance, she would pay obeisance at her mentor's tomb in Pattan and, viscerally, submit to God's will. Every time I am wracked by doubt, I sincerely wish I could imbibe her faith, which some might think proceeded more from instinct than intellect.**

(Excerpted from **Nyla Ali Khan's** forthcoming book *Akbar Jehan Abdullah: Some Memories of My Grandmother*)

◆

Sacred Musings on the Ultimate Reality

–Reviewed by Tej Raina



Shiv Sutra

M. H. Zafar

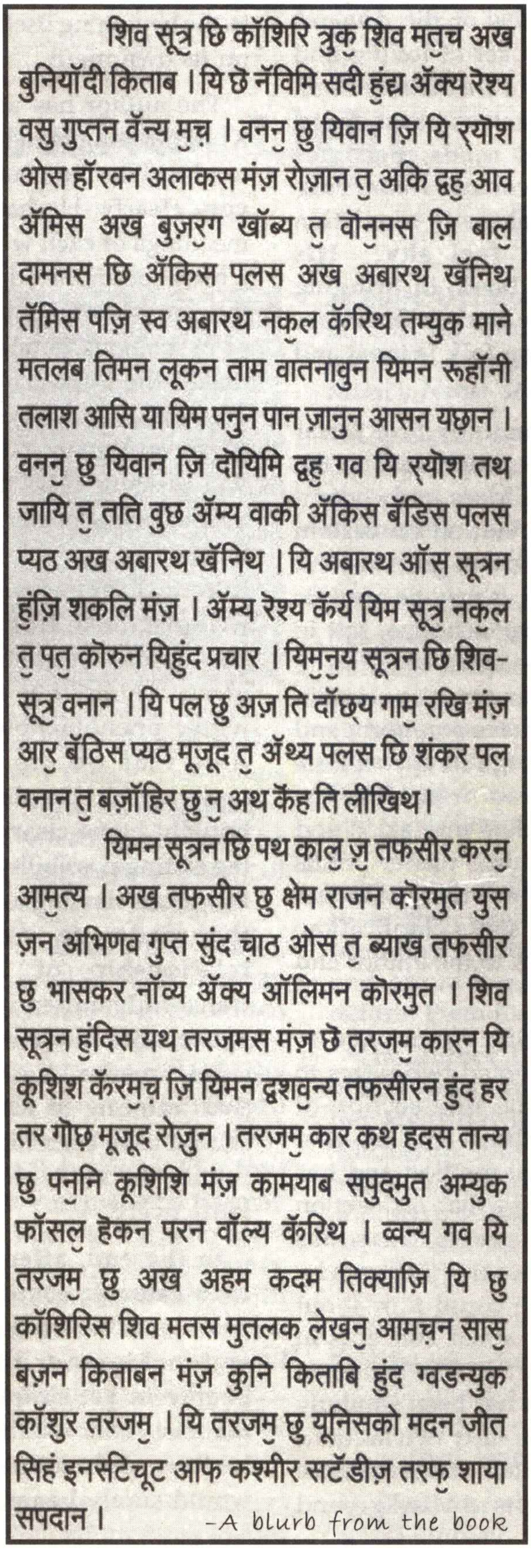
UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute
of Kashmir Studies,
University of Kashmir,
Hazaratbal,
Srinagar-190006

2012

pp. 178; Rs 300

Siva-sûtra, the collection of seventy-seven *Sûtras* by the sage Vasugupta, is the most talked about of the highly revered texts on *Trika Shastra*, the most practical and unique approach of enquiry into the ultimate reality, the incomprehensible transcendental essence of *all*, that is also the foundation of the entire mundane existence, provided by the Kashmir *Saiva* tradition. Held in great esteem, these *sûtras* are supposed to be the direct revelation, on the line of *âgma*, to Vasugupta and therefore stand ever as the essential communication without any dross or speculation. *Sûtras* are supposed to be terse word formations that belong to *sruti* category and therefore are believed to be pregnant with profound meaning and communication that can be severally interpreted and understood at many different planes. Utpaldeva insists that the subtle reality needs highly evolved intellectual faculties for its true comprehension and grasp on the mental plane. As such *Siva-sûtra* have well been interpreted severally. To grasp the communication in these *Sûtras* and then take this profound communication to the folks not familiar with any philosophical approach or argument, and also not acquainted with the delicacies of the Sanskrit language, the garb that these *Sûtras* wear, is a very difficult task, and it becomes more so while attempting to present it in the language of the folk-like Kashmiri in which nothing such has ever been done so far. **This is what Prof. Zafar has done in presenting to readers a truly needed book *Siva-sûtra* in Kashmiri language published by the Institute of Kashmir Studies, University of Kashmir–a highly commendable task that he undertook and did quite satisfactorily. He deserves genuine appreciation and congratulation for such undertaking. His keen approach and honest perseverance is distinctly visible in his work. He has of course utilized, and rightly so, the light of the tradition existing in Kashmiri language that already, unwittingly, is seeped into the psyche of Kashmiri speaking folk, through the profound utterances of Lulla, Shamas-Faqir, Souchhi-kraal, Niama-saeb, Rehman-Dar, Lassa-Khan and others. This serves as a great motivation for the desirous and inquisitive reader to venture into the subtleties of the unknown.**

Prof Zafar has of course missed on one thing, that is, he has somehow not fully realized the difficulty that a Kashmiri speaking novice into such thought and content could experience, in spite of his urge to know. He ought to have introduced first the profound *Trika* concept simply and lucidly, as much as possible, in detail, along with its relevance in the modern thought, creating thus a background for the kind of people not familiar with such philosophical thought, before moving ahead with the writing of commentary on *Siva-Sûtra* actually. He should have also added an extensive glossary or a key to certain technical and unfamiliar terms and concepts to make the reader feel more at ease who otherwise can be left panting. Zafar has been lucid and clear to a great degree in explaining the context and communication of the *Sûtras* in the language of the folk, often substantiating the explanation with the lofty and pregnant utterances of great Kashmiri mystic poets, whose creativity is rich with this spiritual under-current that ran into their blood of conviction through the tradition of generations. This has added a local Kashmiri flavour to the great tradition of *Saiva* perspective, the *Siva-sûtras*, by its re-introduction, as their own heritage, to the ethos of the contemporary folks of Kashmir.



शिव सूत्र छि कॉशिरि त्रुकॖ शिव मतॖच अख बुनियॉदी किताब । यि छे नॅविमि सदी हुंद्य अॅक्य रेश्य वसु गुप्तन वॅन्य मॖच़ । वननॖ छु यिवान ज़ि यि र्योश ओस हॉरवन अलाकस मंज़ रोज़ान तॖ अकि द्वहॖ आव अॅमिस अख बुज़रॖग खॉब्य तॖ वोनॖनस ज़ि बालॖ दामनस छि अॅकिस पलस अख अबारथ खॅनिथ तॅमिस पज़ि स्व अबारथ नकॖल कॅरिथ तम्युक माने मतलब तिमन लूकन ताम वातनावुन यिमन रूहॉनी तलाश आसि या यिम पनुन पान ज़ानुन आसन यछ़ान । वननॖ छु यिवान ज़ि दोयिमि द्वहॖ गव यि र्योश तथ जायि तॖ तति वुछ अॅम्य वाकी अॅकिस बॅडिस पलस प्यठ अख अबारथ खॅनिथ । यि अबारथ ऑस सूत्रन हुंज़ि शकलि मंज़ । अॅम्य रेश्य कॅर्य यिम सूत्र नकॖल तॖ पतॖ कोरुन यिहुंद प्रचार । यिमॖनॖय सूत्रन छि शिव-सूत्र वनान । यि पल छु अज़ ति दॉछ्य गामॖ रखि मंज़ आरॖ बॅठिस प्यठ मूजूद तॖ अॅथ्य पलस छि शंकर पल वनान तॖ बज़ॉहिर छु नॖ अथ कॅंह ति लीखिथ।

यिमन सूत्रन छि पथ कालॖ ज़ॖ तफसीर करनॖ आमॖत्य । अख तफसीर छु क्षेम राजन कोरमुत युस ज़न अभिणव गुप्त सुंद च़ाठ ओस तॖ ब्याख तफसीर छु भासकर नॉव्य अॅक्य ऑलिमन कोरमुत । शिव सूत्रन हुंदिस यथ तरजमस मंज़ छे तरजमॖ कारन यि कूशिश कॅरमॖच़ ज़ि यिमन द्वशवॖन्य तफसीरन हुंद हर तर गोछ़ मूजूद रोज़ुन । तरजमॖ कार कथ हदस तान्य छु पनॖनि कूशिशि मंज़ कामयाब सपुदमुत अम्युक फॉसलॖ हेकन परन वॉल्य कॅरिथ । व्वन्य गव यि तरजमॖ छु अख अहम कदम तिक्याज़ि यि छु कॉशिरिस शिव मतस मुतलक लेखनॖ आमच़न सासॖ बज़न किताबन मंज़ कुनि किताबि हुंद ग्वडन्युक कॉशुर तरजमॖ । यि तरजमॖ छु यूनिसको मदन जीत सिहं इनसटिचूट आफ कश्मीर सटॅडीज़ तरफॖ शाया सपदान ।

-A blurb from the book

Prof. Zafar humbly pleads about his shortcomings with respect to Sanskrit language and the lack of the actuality of his experience in the exploration of *self*, but in the same breath he says that 'love' leads him into his quest. Humility is good, but faith perseveres. If Love is his only motivation then he has the key, the master key. In the serious works like these, it is not a matter purely of translating from Sanskrit to English, or English to Kashmiri, with a few notes that one adds here and there, but it is conceiving, contemplating, basking in its essence and sharing it! It is a journey from *Vaikhari* through *Madhyama* and *Pasyanti* into *Para* and back, always, in every step, consciously. Only the attention, the *Samâveúa,* is the clue for making a deep contact inward and receiving the enlightenment. If, as he believes, devotion and hard work guided him, then each step is a step forward that lifts the veil of delusion a little bit more and sprinkles some more light every time till the revelation happens. *Ânava upaya* is surely the beginning, always, for everyone, for the process of uncovering to begin, but finally, *Anupaya* or the *Anugreh* takes one across. The very act of loving and delving deep is the need, the *Para* dictates itself. '*Abhyasa ghaneraye shâster mothum*' says Lulla. What one reads and not reads, becomes imperative. Love and perseverance leads. **Prof. Zafar has done well, he speaks with conviction and therefore need not feel shy. His contribution, through this book, in bringing the great Kashmiri heritage back to Kashmir, in Kashmiri, for the common folk is great and commendable.**

The commentary in Kashmiri by Prof. Zafar on the *Sûtras* in the book is proper and to the point, and does convey the ideas and content aimed at. True, the interpretation on certain *Sûtras* can be contested on certain grounds, but no interpretation is absolute. It may be a subtle matter of discussion between scholars, but in general he has conveyed the spirit of *Sûtras* to the eager folk in a fine manner. Yes, certain terms and concepts need to have a uniform and specific connotation all through in appropriate words, or else it can mislead or confuse the reader. This needs to be looked into again and set right. I do hope the genuine reader points out any such occasions where he encounters difficulty or confusion and seeks clarification. This shall provide a feedback to the author and help to the reader.

Before taking up each *Sûtra* (from page 16 onward), the author has devoted two pages to introduce the content of the first section of *Sûtras*. He has tried to establish that the first section pertains to *Sâmbhava* method and has referred to first five *Sûtras* in that connection and also opened up certain concepts. This seems out of place. Why refer only to five Sûtras, why not all, or none at all? One could talk about *Sâmbhava upaya* and other allied concepts in spite of *Sûtras* and handle the *Sûtras* in their own turn at their proper place. It has been similarly done at the beginning of the next two sections also. The author could better talk about the three *upayas* and other basic concepts as a background in the beginning itself and handle each *sûtra* later on its own merit.

The author has used a crisp conversational Kashmiri language for the discussion and tried to elucidate the content of his communication very clearly. He has mentioned the accepted meanings of each word in each *Sûtra* and given a brief communication of the *Sûtra* followed by the commentary for each *Sûtra*. He has not talked of extraneous details or irrelevant ideas. This makes the impact of communication stronger. The layout and type (font) of the book is neat, paper and general presentation are attractive and pleasing. The three pictures, one each at the beginning of each section, seem random and lack justification. Nothing is explicit about them. Introductory pages are brief, to the point and well-presented. These provide some background about *Saiva*, but do not help the reader to identify himself as the part and parcel of the whole phenomenon. The concept of *Nara* or *Anu*, that we are, in the great panorama projected by *Siva* through His *Sakti*, was to be brought home clearly to the reader along with the exiting possibility that *anu* in our little selves is capable of rising to Sivahood. This would help the reader to comprehend the visceral relationship of his identity with the transcendental source. There is in fact more transcendental tilt in the narrative of the whole subject matter. A more *parapara* flourishing of *Sakti* relating to our mundane identification should have been highlighted first and then the reader carried along on the path of his rediscovery.

In the end, after thanking the author for such valuable contribution, I look forward to Prof Zafar undertaking more of such projects and making our rich heritage available to people in yet simpler and more meaningful manner. This would be a true service to our heritage and culture. Common thinking folk would surely benefit from it.

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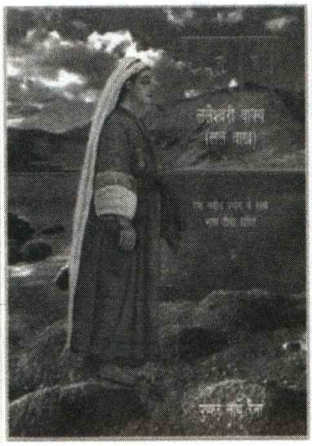
Lal Ded in a New Light

–Reviewed by P. N. Bhat



Paraag
Lalleshwari Vakya

Pushkar Nath Raina

Utpal Publications
R-22, Khaneja Complex,
Main Market,
Shakarpur,
Delhi-110092

2013

pp. 279; Rs 300

In the spate of works that have appeared on the mystic poetess Lal Ded's life and works, Pushkar Nath Raina's *Paraag: Lalleshwari Vakya* is the latest addition. It is heartening to know that the volume throws a refreshing new light on the enigmatic personality and esoteric poetry of the saint-poetess of 14th century in Kashmir.

The author has set some goals while writing the book on such a great saint of Shaiv darshan whose *vakhs* have come down to us in unwritten form from 14th century when there was a cultural ferment in Kashmir. Lal Ded had felt the challenge posed to *trika shastra* and Hindu thought. She, therefore, taught the masses the right path in their own language. The first attempt to write the *vakhs* was made by Rajanak Bhaskar. Many authors collected the *vakhs* from the bards and common people, both the Hindus and Muslims who loved them to sing with devotion and faith, and gave them the book form. The Jammu and Kashmir Cultural Academy also printed the Lal *vakh* in 1961. Before that, Grierson and others had also published Lal *vakh*.

Pushkar Nath Raina's attempt is praiseworthy as he has divided the book in four subtitles: i) Historical Background, ii) Lala's Life, iii) Lala's Spiritual Journey and iv) Division of Lal *vakhs* according to the principles of Bharat Muni's *Natya Shastra*.

The author has set three goals before writing the book. These are (a) to correct the language and point out difference of opinion in Lal *vakhs* (b) to minimize the errors and write the meaning of words, and (c) to explain each *vakh*.

The author has pointed out some words in this preface where different authors have given different meanings to such words. He gives his meaning according to the context of the *vakh* and its correct Kashmiri word. He has given about twenty such examples. The author has taken help from Badrinath Sopori's book *A Peep into High Humanity* and added some more *vakhs* in his collection. He warns some authors from attempting to dilute the meaning of Lal *Vakhs* to suit their whims. He has given some examples from Bimla Raina's book *Lala Meri Nazar Mein* and asked her to correct the *vakhs* and not deform them to disrespect Lal Ded.

The author has described Lala's life very briefly and aptly so. He has dealt in detail about her spiritual journey under her preceptor Shitikanth. She suffered a lot in her in-laws' house due to the cruelty of her mother-in-law and apathy and carelessness of her husband. Lala passed her last days at Bijbehara and also left her mortal remains there.

Some important features of the book are:

1) The *vakhs* have been divided into two parts. The first part consists of 192 *vakhs*. The other part has 26 *vakhs* that do not look to be Lala's as their language and context is different.
2) First the Lal *vakh* is given in Devnagri with its number.

3) Below it are given the names of different writers of Lal *vakhs* with their number of the same Lal *vakh* in their respective books.
4) Then the *vakh* is written in the shaded lines. Meaning of each word is given below in Hindi to make it understandable to readers of Hindi.
5) Explanation of each *vakh* is given below each box in Hindi.

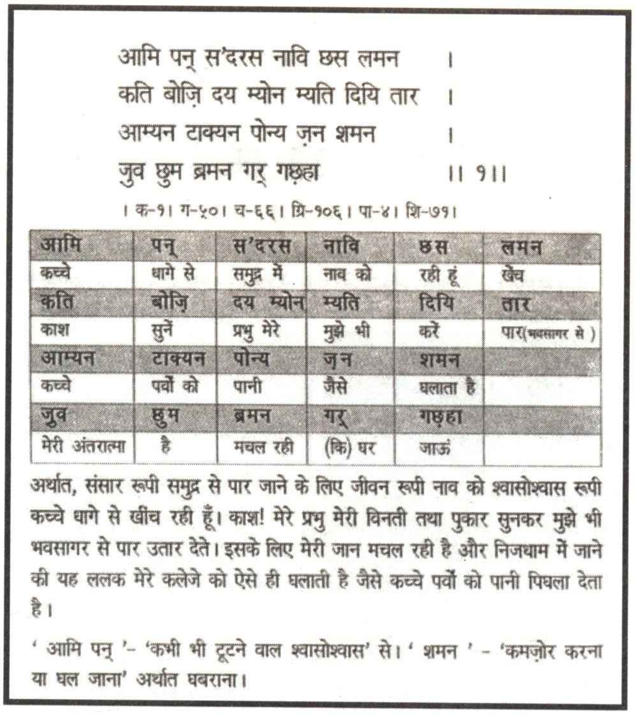
This kind of attempt by the writer is praiseworthy as he has kept in mind the readers of the national language to make Lala known to them. Besides our children, born away from Kashmir after the migration of 1989-90, will be able to appreciate the greatness of Lal Moj.

The writer of *Paraag* has taken pains to give the *vakhs* correct numbering in accordance with the evolution of Lala's spiritual journey. He has described it in some journey stoppages as under:

1) Beginning	Inquisitive	(*vakhs* 1-8)
2) Effort	Meeting of the preceptor	(*vakhs* 9-32)
3) Endeavour to reach the goal	Hope of attainment	(*vakhs* 33-46)
4) Expectation of reaping fruits of God-realization	Hope	(*vakhs* 47-90)
5) Attainment of the fruits of penance	Complete union with Lord Shiva	(*vakhs* 91-138)
6) Fragrance	Diffusion	(*vakhs* 139-192)

By dividing the *vakhs* in the above mentioned manner, the writer has, I believe, taken help from his own experiences of spiritual journey. It has thus given a new shape and sublimity to the *vakhs*. Their haphazardly made collections have now become obsolete. The *Paraag* by Pushkar Nath Raina has shown a new approach to Lal *vakhs*. I hope readers of the book will enjoy them and admire the author for his deep-sighted understanding of Lala as a great yogini of Trika philosophy of Kashmir.

The arrangement of *vakhs* in this book is based on the evolution of self-realization of Lal Ded from the desire to the attainment of the goal. Different stages of Sadhna–listening of the *mantra* (spell) from the *Guru* (preceptor) called *shravan* (listening) to *manan* (meditation) and onwards to the fulfillment of desire to sin by the side of the Lord–in other words, union with Shiva–is a new positive and philosophical approach of the author. As I said earlier, being a *sadhak* himself he might have passed through such stages himself and realized how to rearrange the *vakhs* in a foolproof order. I congratulate Pushkar Nath Raina on his marvellous and commendable insight into Lal *vakhs* according to their birth from desire to fulfilment of that desire.



आमि पन् स'दरस नावि छस लमन ।
कति बोज़ि दय म्योन म्यति दियि तार ।
आम्यन टाक्यन पोन्य ज़न शमन ।
जुव छुम ब्रमन गर् गछ़हा ॥ १॥

। क-१। ग-५०। च-६६। ग्रि-१०६। पा-४। शि-७१।

आमि	पन्	स'दरस	नावि	छस	लमन
कच्चे	धागे से	समुद्र में	नाव को	रही हूं	खेंच
कति	बोज़ि	दय म्योन	म्यति	दियि	तार
काश	सुनें	प्रभु मेरे	मुझे भी	करें	पार(भवसागर से)
आम्यन	टाक्यन	पोन्य	ज़न	शमन	
कच्चे	पर्वों को	पानी	जैसे	घलाता है	
जुव	छुम	ब्रमन	गर्	गछ़हा	
मेरी अंतरात्मा	है	मचल रही	(कि) घर	जाऊं	

अर्थात, संसार रूपी समुद्र से पार जाने के लिए जीवन रूपी नाव को श्वासोश्वास रूपी कच्चे धागे से खींच रही हूँ। काश! मेरे प्रभु मेरी विनती तथा पुकार सुनकर मुझे भी भवसागर से पार उतार देते। इसके लिए मेरी जान मचल रही है और निजधाम में जाने की यह ललक मेरे कलेजे को ऐसे ही घलाती है जैसे कच्चे पर्वों को पानी पिघला देता है।

' आमि पन् '- 'कभी भी टूटने वाल श्वासोश्वास' से। ' शमन ' - 'कमज़ोर करना या घल जाना' अर्थात घबराना।

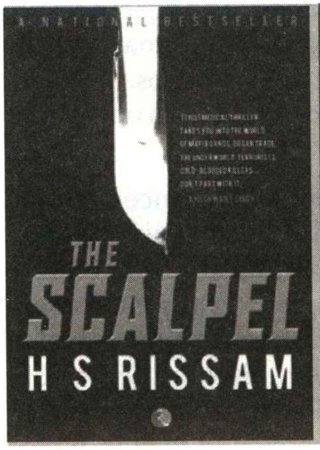
The actual meaning of the words of Lala as per the context the particular *vakh* keeping in mind *Shivadarshan* and spiritual journey of a pupil is befitting and correct. He alone who has trodden such a difficult path can explain a *vakh* of a great saint of the stature of Lal Ded who is adored and loved by both Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. The advice of Lala is for the upliftment of a human being irrespective of any faith or creed.

A very good book and a must-read one by all those who have a serious interest in Lal Ded's *oeuvre*.

* * *

Of Crimes and Criminals

–Reviewed by Pankaj Bhan



The Scalpel

H S Rissam

Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
7/16, Ansari Road,
Daryaganj,
New Delhi-110002

2010

pp. 332; Rs 295

Dr. H. S. Rissam, a senior cardiologist at Max Super Speciality Hospital, traces his roots to Kashmir at least three centuries back when his great-great-great-great grandfather Sant Thakur Baba Rocha Singh Maharaj established a religious centre and went into meditation for 400 days in Baramulla. The holy site is still functional atop a hill and is known as Gurudwara Tapiyana Sahib. It is visited by people of all faiths as a source of spiritual solace. The association continued to the present generation with Dr. Rissam serving as Head of Cardiology Department at Govt. Medical College, SMHS Hospital, Srinagar from 1980-90. He had to leave the valley in 1990 like thousands of others to escape the cycle of violence and counter-violence and the resultant atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

In this background, it is not surprising that Kashmir makes its presence felt in Dr. Rissam's medico-detective novel *The Scalpel* at several places–sometimes as a crucial ingredient in the storyline and at other times as backdrop to a touching piece of romantic love between Nona Lal, the female protagonist of the novel, and a Kashmiri boy Suleiman. There are other occasions too when Kashmir impinges on the writer's consciousness in direct and indirect ways.

The Scalpel is a riveting tale of international mafia trade in medical tourism and organ sale that is awesome and chilling. It has four major dramatis personae engaged in their respective spheres of work in different parts of the world but who criss-cross and interact with each other. The first is a poverty-stricken child from Chhapra, Bihar who runs away from home and, after passing through strange vicissitudes, emerges as an international don presiding over a syndicate of crime. He functions at two levels– as the proprietor of R. K. Group of Industries, a highly respected international corporate giant, and as Hassan Paasha, a global mafia don running an international racket of crime.

The second is Nona Lal, a young princess from a former Himalayan princely state who joins an international anti-terror organisation to counter crime. During one of her visits to India, she is intrigued by the appearance of a mysterious looking person. In the pursuit of this mystery man, she stumbles upon the operations run by the mafia and rushes in to counter it. By the end of the novel, she manages to expose it in the heart of the Indian capital with a big bang.

The third is Dr. Tejwani, a diabolic cardiac surgeon who runs the façade of a hospital which serves as the front for the activities of the mafia. It is also the centre where poor people are brought, their organs extracted and stumps of their bodies burnt in an incinerator with no trace left. The final prong of the quartet is Dr. Bassra, a noble physician employed in Dr. Tejwani's hospital who acts as the whistle-blower and exposes the mafia and its horrendous activities.

The novel works on a wide international canvas with frequent travels to and from all the happening cities of the world. It also brings out multiple hues like love, lust, lies, greed, deceit, hate, vanity, honesty, beauty, scams, intrigues, violence, killings, scandals and what not. On this wide canvas laced with multiple hues, the storyline hurtles along with breathtaking speed making the readers glued to the goings on. Being a practising surgeon, Dr. Rissam's knowledge of medical science invests the details of the illegal medical tourism and organ trade with authenticity. For instance, in the last part of the novel, the listing of the body parts used for organ trading, their rates, the modus operandi of transplantation, the burning of the body after all the organs have been taken out, etc. make for chilling reading.

Now, where does Kashmir come in this global operations of mafiadom and the international anti-terror agency which finally succeeds in liquidating it? Yes, in two major ways and both so diametrically different from each other that they seem pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The first is involving Kashmir in a terror plot to exploit the sensitive political issue for nefarious ends. The basis for this is laid out in the preliminary discussion between mafia dons which enunciates a clear game plan:

> ... In our line of work, we have got to support underground movements like freedom struggles, revolutionary organisations and rebellious resistance groups. That helps us to establish a powerful network which provides us with the strength and stability to ward off any governmental assault on our system. I suggest that you get connected with one of the political movements in the Indian subcontinent–either Kashmir, Sri Lanka or Afghanistan...I suggest, however, that you associate yourself with Kashmir–a hot spot at this time ...You will be expected to do something spectacular to establish your credentials and supremacy.
>
> (*The Scalpel*, p. 61)

In accordance with this plan, the Indian Airlines, flight 736, Delhi-Jammu-Srinagar-Leh is hijacked from Delhi. Soon six more planes are hijacked from other cities in India besides causing a series of explosions that take place at Palam. Pakistan is sought to be involved as a major diplomatic tiff between the two countries is manipulated. Finally, both India and Pakistan are warned to keep their hands off Kashmir. This entire terror drama is enacted to catapult Rashid Khan *alias* Hassan Paasha to the centre stage of global mafia. It does: 'The hijacks firmly established Hassan Paasha's supremacy in the underworld headed by the Rossanos. He was declared the chief of Euro-Australasia operations by the conglomerate.'

The second is the incipient romance between a young Nona Lal and a local boy Suleiman developed against the backdrop of the breath-takingly beautiful Pahalgam. While Dr. Rissam is a competent writer, this part of the novel is written with a sensitivity that is ineluctably heart-felt and is tinged with a heavy dose of nostalgia. Note the impassioned way in which he describes what the young lovers felt:

> Their walk turned out to be a fairy-tale experience. The grass under their feet was wet and soft...The sky was lit by a full moon...The stars twinkled brightly...A cool breeze was blowing through the trees...The fragrance of pine trees filled the air...The pine needles crunched and crackled under their feet...The snow-clad peaks at a distance reflected the moonlight, like shining silverware...The waves of the Lidder splashing on the banks created a celestial music...They walked silently, no one wanting to break the spell.
>
> (*The Scalpel*, p.183)

While Nona has fallen for Suleiman, the latter does not reciprocate her feelings. And thereby ends this incipient love in a whimper leading to Nona's angry and frustrated reaction.

In short, *The Scalpel* is a spine-chilling tale of global mafia operations and its repercussions for peace and well-being of all nations. However, readers who are interested in Kashmir will also find in it a lot that links it with the region in many, often contradictory, ways.

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New Delhi 110 002

Printed, Published and Edited by Pankaj Bhan on behalf of Kasheer Foundation at D-61, Gulmohar Park, New Delhi-110 049
Printed at M/s. G.H. Prints Pvt. Ltd., A-256, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi-20.

ISSN 2278-2125 Miraas

RNI NO. DELENG/2008/24934

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